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This Toronto couple opted for a small, simple wedding. Instead of spending big, they used the money to sponsor a family of Syrian refugees.

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

GLORIA STEINEM ON HILLARY CLINTON'S CHANCES:

'We and especially men feel regressed to child-hood when we see powerful women.'

Rosemary Westwood
In metroviews

Community marches against hate

FLEMINGDON PARK

Muslim woman attacked, told 'go back to your own country'

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

Days after a woman was attacked in an apparent hate crime, residents of Toronto's Flemingdon Park neighbourhood are vowing not be held back by fear.

Hundreds of residents will march Friday, starting at 10 a.m., from Gateway Boulevard to Grenoble Public School, where the assault took place Monday.

It is both an act of solidarity for the community and an attempt to assuage any safety concerns, said organizer Mohan Doss.

"Despite what a few individuals might want to do to harm people, no one should feel alienated or isolated in any way. We stand together," he said.

The attack on the Muslim woman — who was going to pick up her children from school when two men assaulted her and told her to "go back to your country" — has left the community shaken, Doss said.

Many students haven't come back to school since, he said, and parents, especially single mothers, are still afraid sending their children out unaccompanied.

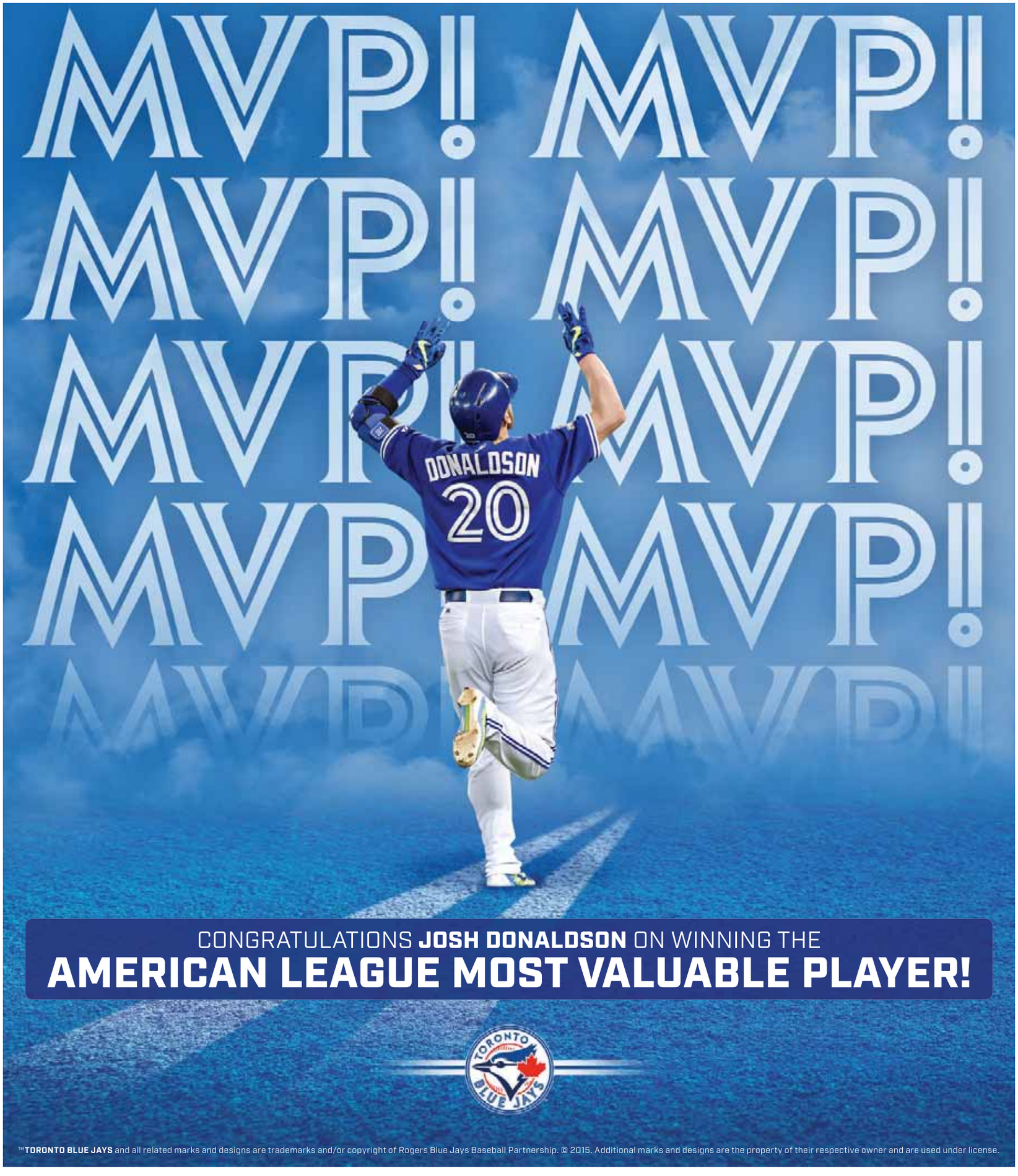
Mayor John Tory visited the school Wednesday, and said no one in the city should be scared because of their religion or country of origin.

A spate of anti-Muslim incidents have occurred in and around Toronto since the attacks in Paris last week. A mosque was burned in Peterborough, and TTC and GO Transit both reported incidents of offensive comments against Muslims Wednesday.

> **No one is left out.... That's what Canada stands for.**
> Organizer Mohan Doss

Doss said Friday's march is a way of standing up for true Canadian values.

"We are all the same because we are all different. That's our uniting force," he said. "No one stands out, no one is left out. Nobody should be segregated against. That's what Canada stands for."



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metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

Drought in South Africa could make rooibos teas scarce and pricey. **Business**

Christmas is coming...

CHRISTMAS MARKET **DECK THE DISTILLERY DISTRICT** Beth Edney, official site decorator for the Distillery District's annual Toronto Christmas Market, puts the finishing touches on Santa's House, Thursday afternoon. "We have 400 10-inch balls. It's 54 feet, 18,000 lights and we spent four days making the garland," said Edney. The market, in its sixth year, runs from Friday through Dec. 20 and will offer entertainment, vendors and installations. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

RINKS

...but don't get your skates on, at least not yet

Mallory Chate
For Metro | Toronto

Hey Toronto: no need to get those ice skates sharpened soon.

The city is in the midst of a warm spell, and the above-average temperatures could pose a problem for local skating rinks.

"We are seeing the warm weather now," said Environment Canada's Peter Kimball, adding November temperatures have been four to five degrees higher than usual.

Kimball said the mild conditions are the result of El Nino; a mass of warm water in the Pacific Ocean creating warmer temperatures in South and North America. Cooler temperatures are on the way, however, and the city looks to be pushing ahead with the skating season.

Waterfront parks manager James Dann said 36 of Toronto's 51 rinks are set to open on Nov. 28 as scheduled.

"The rough math that we need is 5 C or less," he said. "If there's any ability to make and maintain ice, there will be an expectation that we do so."

If you are a skating fan, you may want to get your ice time in while you can. A recent Wilfrid Laurier University study on climate change found that by the year 2090, Toronto will see a 34 per cent decrease in days cold enough to go skating.

Above-seasonal temperatures could delay the start of Toronto's ice-skating season, but city officials are working to **open at least 36 local rinks.** TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS IN THE GTA

Christmas Craft Show

Toronto's Indigenous community is celebrating the holidays with its outdoor Christmas Craft Show. Go spend a day outside, eat some traditional fare, take part in a few raffles, and maybe find a one-of-a-kind gift for a loved one.

The Krampus Ball

the Krampus Ball is the night where Christmas meets Halloween. On Dec. 11 at the Opera House, ditch your annual work party, and dress up in costume in the spirit of the holidays at the scariest holiday party you'll ever go to.

Santa Storybook Experience

Enjoy the family-friendly, interactive show at the Sherway Gardens, where children can help Santa save Christmas.

Join in the Santa Giant Storybook Experience to work with Kris Kringle on an adventure to help him deliver all his presents on time.

Toronto Christmas Pet Show

This year show your pets some holiday love to and bring them out to the Christmas Pet Show in Toronto's Downsview Park on Saturday and Sunday.

Santa Holiday Train

No, seriously — you can ride the train with Santa Claus on the York-Durham Heritage Railway. You can find Santa and tell him what you want for Christmas if you take a trip up to the Uxbridge train station.

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Policy shift sought on bicycle removals

TRANSPORTATION

Charity calls on council to save bikes from scrap heap

Chris Bateman
For Metro | Toronto

A local charity says Toronto needs to change gears on how it deals with abandoned bikes.

The city is currently in the middle of a major removal blitz, ticketing and removing junk bikes from public streets.

Andre Filippetti from the city's right-of-way management division said workers have taken 900 derelict bikes into storage.

"Those are the ones with both wheels off, rusted, bent frames, clearly stripped and left for dead," he said.

Unfortunately for Tanya Smith's Bikes Without Borders charity, most end up as scrap.

Smith would like to fix up more of the city's abandoned bikes, but said renting space to do the work can be a drain. She'd like to see the city invite charities like hers into their storage facility instead.

"You're talking about a large facility sitting there with rusty bikes in it," she said.

"Every (bike charity) that has an extremely tiny operating budget could come in and operate right out of that facility (and) fix those bikes."

The last time the city made a donation of bikes was 2013. Robert Orpin, acting deputy general manager of solid waste management services, said the current bicycle storage facility isn't suitable for any other purpose.

"We don't have a work space that charities could utilize," he said. "The space is not a workshop — it's a steel building that's unheated and it has no lights."

"We aren't looking at expanding our program whatsoever. We don't have any money to expand it," he said.

The city is in the middle of a tag-and-remove blitz, targeting abandoned and derelict bicycles. So far, workers have removed **more than 900 bikes** from public spaces. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

DEVELOPMENT

City cuts red tape on affordable housing

The city is offering incentives to developers to build affordable housing downtown and elsewhere as the waiting list for those units climbs toward 200,000 people.

On Thursday, Mayor John Tory announced the expansion and details of an open-door program to eliminate red tape at city hall and also provide a financial push for developers to build.

"We are massively behind," Tory said, referring to building new housing. "The days of city hall taking months and years and decades — only, half the time, to find ways to say no — must come to an end, especially in regards to affordable housing."

13

The city has identified 13 pieces of land for affordable housing.

Part of those efforts include fast-tracking development of city surplus lands, such as the gravel pit at the northwest edge of CityPlace in the city's downtown, where Tory made the announcement. The site has been empty for more than 20 years.

Once developed, that space will include a minimum of 80 affordable housing units, said Coun. Joe Cressy.

"Today there are 18,000 residents living in this neighbourhood, and as a city we need to continue to focus on building neighbourhoods, not just adding density," Cressy said.

The CityPlace site is one of five city sites that will host the creation of 389 affordable rental or ownership units. The city has also identified 13 additional surplus pieces of land for future development as part of the program.

Incentives for private developers will include waiving permit fees, streamlining the application process and deferring development charges.

Tory also called on the provincial and federal governments to "search their hearts and souls" and offer up more public land for affordable housing development.

The city has chosen five sites for the development of the affordable housing units, notably on Madison Avenue, Tippett Road, Block 36 North, 505 Richmond St. W. and 150 Harrison Ave. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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COMMUNITY

'People will underestimate you'

Everyday Political Citizens

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Every year, Samara Canada's Everyday Political Citizen project honours Canadians who are making positive changes in their communities. The winner of the contest will be announced Dec. 3, 2015.

Metro is profiling the four EPC nominees in the Greater Toronto Area. Today, we meet Amin Ali, a 14-year-old from North York with a bright political future.

With a seat on Toronto's youth city council and a lengthy list of volunteer activities with the local NDP, **Amin Ali's political resume** is already longer than that of most. CONTRIBUTED

Amin Ali might be Toronto's youngest policy wonk.

The 14-year-old high school student from North York isn't your typical teenager. His hobbies include reading detailed policy documents, volunteering his time with Toronto's city youth council and engaging in nuanced political debates on Facebook.

"Only about one of my friends at school understands what I'm talking about," he says.

And at a time when many youth are eschewing partisan politics, Ali has moved in the opposite direction. He's a card-carrying member of the NDP and deeply involved in the party's local youth wing.

While party politics aren't perfect, he believes they're still the best avenue for making change in Canada.

"You can sit on the sidelines and complain about things or you can get a seat at the table and advocate for what you believe in," he said.

Ali believes in a more equitable and democratic Canada. He's a fan of voting reform, and perhaps unsurprisingly, he'd like to see the voting age lowered to 16.

"Youth are going to be running things one day, and we're not given adequate space to give our input," he said.

Ali is one of the youngest Everyday Political Citizen nominees, but said his experience going to NDP conventions has him used to being the youngest person in the room.

"People will underestimate you. Sometimes they'll write you off, but then when you get up and speak, they're surprised," he said.

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Don't call it Kensington Market. The popular Toronto neighbourhood's BIA is asking the media not to refer to the area by that monicker when writing about illegal activity. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE

Kensington, by any other name

REPORTING

Exact location of crime would sound just as sweet, begs BIA

Chris Bateman
For Metro | Toronto

When is Kensington Market not Kensington Market? When crime happens, if the local business improvement area (BIA) has its way.

The Kensington Market BIA wants the media to stop calling the neighbourhood Kensington Market in crime reports. A press release issued yesterday said stories that name Kensington Market are "a smear on the good name of everyone who lives and works here."

Peter Sanagan, a BIA board member and owner of Sanagan's Meat Locker in Kensington Market, said his neighbourhood often gets lumped in with surrounding areas for convenience.

"I don't want to mislead people to say, 'This didn't happen in our neighbourhood,' but I don't want it to be (that) Kensington Market as a brand gets that negative attention," he said.

"Instead of saying Kensington Market, you'd say Spadina and Baldwin or you'd say Dundas and Augusta."

Sanagan said a recent machete attack on Nov. 9 was the kind of isolated incident that hurts the image of Kensington Market.

Most major news outlets, including the CBC, Global News, CTV News and Metro Toronto, used Kensington Market in the headline and the intersection — Nassau Street and Bellevue Avenue — in the body of the story.

Toronto police said they always use the nearest intersection in their communications.

"We generally wouldn't refer to a specific area," said Const. Craig Brister. "Your idea of what the Kensington Market neighbourhood is might be different to what my idea is."

HOMICIDE

Detectives without a motive in killing of teen

Homicide detectives are continuing to investigate the killing of an 18-year-old college student.

Simone "Shanni" Reid was found dead in an apartment complex near Warden Avenue and Highway 401 on Friday, inside the unit she shared with her father.

Since her death, police have been unable to locate her father, Winston "Paul" Reid. Homicide detective Ted Lioumanis said police do not have enough information to say whether Winston Reid is a suspect.

So far, there is "nothing at all" that could explain why Reid was killed, Lioumanis said.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

QUALITY OF LIFE

Coders commute to make apps for Kenya

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

Toronto and Nairobi are teaming up to hack poverty.

Hundreds of software developers from the two cities will put their heads — and their keyboards — together this weekend as they take part in a joint international development hackathon.

Taking place over Skype, the exercise looks to get coders to build mobile apps that will help improve life for rural Kenyans, whether they're related to health, access to education or even farming.

"The skills of these developers can have a really big impact on rural people's lives," said Danielle Thé, founder of Devs Without Borders, a Toronto-based mobile tech startup that prepared the hackathon.

Participants from Toronto will spend part of the weekend learning about real issues on the ground from their counterparts in Kenya. The East African nation has made strides in technology, and residents in rural areas can now benefit from well-tailored apps, Thé said.

Some of the apps on deck could help residents measure prices of their agricultural products or monitor maternal health.

"The No. 1 goal is increasing access to information," Thé said.

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Inside TTC's 'Stygian hellhole'

TRANSPORT

Transit agency seeks solutions as staff suffer in decaying HQ

The CEO of the TTC, Andy Byford, describes the transit system's Davisville headquarters as a "Stygian hellhole," with some employees working in spaces akin to "veal crates."

His boss, chairman Josh Colle, agrees that some of the working conditions are "deplorable." He wants the transit board to take the politically perilous step of recommending the transit agency move out of the 1958 McBrien building into a modern space large enough to accommodate the system's 3,000 office staff under one roof.

Having staff scattered among Davisville, which accommodates about 400, and a half-dozen leased offices around the city doesn't make sense and costs the TTC more than $8.4 million a year, he said.

"We need to find a new home for the TTC. There's some existing buildings around we could move into. That's the best possibility. But just to have different leases and spaces, some owned, some in terrible condition, is just so inefficient and costly," said Colle.

It's not clear what the TTC would have to spend for new digs, but Colle thinks it would save the agency money. It is one of the business rationalization steps Colle is asking the transit board to consider on Monday when it debates the 2016 operating budget, likely to include a fare increase.

The TTC outgrew Davisville a decade ago. And the offices are in need of $2.7 million in repairs over the next two years, according to a May report. A consultant's report on potential consolidation solutions is due in the new year. Colle says he would like the TTC to remain in a central location such as Yonge and Eglinton, where the subway will intersect with the Eglinton Crosstown LRT in five years.

"It's ludicrous we're spread to the four winds," said Byford, who added he's not looking for marble and gold.

"Ultimately, being world-class and having a truly customer-led workforce can only be delivered by people who feel motivated and happy in their work," he said.

A recent employee survey showed working conditions are a leading complaint among TTC staff.

"Occasionally you walk past a cupboard — but it's not a cupboard, there's someone working in there, no windows, this tiny little hole," said Byford.

"There's areas we can't put things because the floor won't take the weight, the ceilings are stained, we've just had a big mould outbreak."

A major renovation risks the expense of bringing it up to more modern building and fire standards. The elevators are on their last legs, and there are no sprinklers above the basement, he said.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Out with the mould, in with the new? The TTC may move home as their Davisville HQ, left, is blighted by water damage, mould, cramped conditions for staff and crumbling interiors.

PHOTOS: VINCE TALOTTA/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Imam Belal Ahmad. RICK MADONIK/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

SEX ED

Peel school board consults imams

The Peel school board's information guide on the new sex-education curriculum has a crucial stamp of approval from four local imams — and the board is also arranging information sessions for parents to be held at two local mosques.

The outreach is a part of its plan to counter the misinformation that ran rampant in many communities about the updated health curriculum implemented in schools this fall. When the Peel District School Board recently released its guide outlining what children will be taught and in what grade, it did so with the support of a number of faith and cultural groups.

Missing, however, were imams. So, after four recently attended a two-hour workshop on the curriculum — the same one teachers are receiving — they issued a statement of support of Peel's efforts.

One was Imam Belal Ahmad of the Islamic Society of Peel, who also teaches Grade 5 at a private Islamic school in Brampton. He said "I want to be sure my community has information about the issue."

Imam Zahir Bacchus, also a teacher at a private Islamic school, said the Peel board approached imams and they suggested allowing imams to sit in with teachers in workshops on how to teach the curriculum.

Attending the workshops "was a wonderful expression from them, of reaching out to the community and showing us exactly what they are going to be teaching," he said. Leaders from other faiths are also taking part.

Peel's is the only Ontario board going to such efforts regarding the updated curriculum, which was first introduced in 2010 by then-premier Dalton McGuinty but ditched until this school year. Opponents have called it immoral and age-inappropriate.

PRAISE

Imams applaud approach

"We appreciate and applaud the PDSB for their efforts in creating a parent guide for the new curriculum and for accepting our request for a simulated session of the teacher's workshop that allowed us the opportunity to provide feedback. These types of ongoing engagements will help to alleviate the concerns in regards to the new Health and Physical Education Curriculum, and foster a solid relationship of trust and understanding." OFFICIAL STATEMENT

Bride and groom vow to help Syrian family

COMMUNITY

Couple calls off expensive affair to sponsor refugees

Jessica Smith Cross
Metro | Toronto

When it came to helping Syrian refugees, both Samantha Jackson and Farzin Yousefian said, "I do."

The Toronto couple were planning to get married next March.

They had sent out the invitations, picked out a venue, an art gallery in Parkdale and decided on a caterer.

But in September, they contacted their friends and families and told them the wedding, as they knew it, was off.

They still got married — at an intimate, and inexpensive, ceremony at city hall Oct. 9. But all of the money that would have gone to their reception or their wedding gifts is now being used to sponsor a Syrian refugee family to come to Canada.

Everyone, from the caterers to their families, understood the decision, Jackson said.

"They were thrilled. Our friends and family were so supportive and so generous in their giving, it was amazing," she said.

Jackson, a PhD student, works for Ryerson University's Lifeline Syria Challenge and is sponsoring the family through that group.

"The money will be used for anything anyone would need in the first 12 months of settling in a new country — shelter, food, clothes and everything in between," she said.

Jackson has read stories in the news about anti-refugee sentiment and recent hate crimes against Muslims, including the beating of a Toronto woman and the burning of a Peterborough mosque.

She hopes her wedding story sends the opposite message.

If any Syrian families seeking to come to Canada read it, she hopes it says, "You're welcome here."

Above: **Samantha Jackson and her husband Farzin Yousefian** had a simple city hall ceremony, and decided to forgo a reception, in order to sponsor a family of Syrian refugees. Below: The couple on their wedding day, with Toronto Mayor John Tory, at city hall. CONTRIBUTED

SOCIAL LIFE

New event offers young Muslims chance to mix, mingle

Steven Zhou
For Metro | Toronto

A new social event is headed to Toronto, promising young Muslims in the city the chance to meet and mingle — just don't expect any alcohol.

On Saturday, a U.S group called Ill Muslims is hosting Be Social Toronto, an evening billed as a "social and creative platform for millennial Muslims."

Ill Muslims co-founder Rummi Khan, second from right, chats with attendees at one of his group's Chicago events. CONTRIBUTED

Ill Muslims has already held over a dozen events in the U.S., but Saturday's mixer at District 28 (28 Logan Ave.) is the group's first foray into Canada. Their parties feature a club-like atmosphere — complete with a DJ and alcohol-free "mocktails" — where men and women can hang out together. It's a far cry from your typical Muslim gathering, said Ill Muslims' 29-year-old co-founder, Rummi Khan.

"Honestly, I just feel like we need more places where younger Muslims can actually meet those who're like-minded," says Haseeb Kayani, a 29-year-old corporate strategist who plans to attend Saturday.

"I'm just drawn to the event because it seems way less conservative than most get-togethers in our community."

Khan said Ill Muslims is about bringing members of the faith together in a nonsectarian way. That kind of unity is needed, he said, when so much of the world sees Islam through the lens of events like last week's terror attacks in Paris.

"There's a lot of divisiveness in the Muslim community and we're trying to be an open space where all are welcome," he said.

As of Thursday, Be Social Toronto's Facebook page showed over 500 attendees, with another 400 "interested" in going.

However, with tickets going for $36.50, some in Toronto's Muslim community feel the event risks being exclusionary.

"I think it's important to not mix up celebrating our community's creativity with developing a market to sell stuff to rich millennials who don't mix with the more conservative elements of the Muslim community," said Rizwan Mohammad, 34, who has done work for the Canadian Council of Muslim Women.

"We honestly try to include everybody," Khan replied. "I think you'll see people from all segments of the community, whether conservative or liberal."

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MIKE DUFFY

Trial hears about contracts

Gerald Donohue wasn't a professional speechwriter or researcher, didn't have any particular public policy background and wasn't the employee or officer of any company.

But over the span of three years, the longtime friend of Sen. Mike Duffy took in roughly $65,000 in taxpayer money for various contracts, directing the money through a firm owned by his wife and son.

He also signed several cheques on behalf of the firm to other individuals and companies that Duffy wanted paid for Senate work — an intern, a makeup artist, speechwriters.

Sen. Mike Duffy THE CANADIAN PRESS

Donohue's testimony in Ottawa on Thursday marked the winding down of the Crown's fraud, breach of trust and bribery case against Duffy. The senator has pleaded not guilty to all 31 counts.

The Crown alleges the $65,000 in contracts awarded to Donohue was used as a slush fund for Duffy to pay for services that wouldn't pass muster with the Senate.

Prosecutors had tried several times over the last seven months to call Donohue as a witness, but poor health continually postponed his testimony. THE CANADIAN PRESS

FAITH

Hijab Day targets fallacies

Members of Halifax's Muslim community are confronting misconceptions about their faith by holding an information session about the hijab this weekend.

Anyone who stops by the Halifax Central Library for Hijab Day on Saturday will be invited to try one on.

Abdelkader Tayebi, imam for the Ummah Mosque in Halifax, says he hopes the first-person experience will help people better understand those who wear the hijab, which covers the head and neck but not the face.

"It's no longer something that is related to a minority or a couple of people, so it has surfaced as a matter of concern to Canadians," he said. "It's being seen as something imported from outside, from the Middle East, whereas it is now a Canadian thing."

Tayebi says there are many mistaken ideas surrounding the hijab, including the notion that men are forcing women to wear them.

Event organizer Maram Saidi hopes the simple act of trying on the hijab will help to forge a path to a larger understanding of Islam that could dispel anti-immigrant sentiment, focused on Muslims. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Syrian refugees gather outside their embassy waiting to apply for passports in Amman, Jordan, in September. Some of the refugees may be resettled in Canada. RAAD ADAYLEH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Government eyes winter housing

REFUGEES

Notice seeks temporary sites for 500 to 3,000 people

The federal government is searching for temporary winter housing for thousands of people across Canada days before the expected unveiling of its plan to bring in 25,000 Syrian refugees by year's end.

Public Works and Government Services is establishing a list of facilities that can provide winterized housing at various sites across Canada, the Star has learned.

The sites will have to accommodate between 500 and 3,000 people for as long as three months, according to a notice posted Thursday.

"The Government of Canada is seeking interested companies that have the capacity, capability and availability to provide leasing, management and servicing of temporary winterized lodgings for groups of 500-3,000 people by early December 2015 at sites to be confirmed," the notice reads.

It's not yet known if the request is specific to the needs of the expected refugees. The Public Works employee responsible for the notice refused to comment. The Star has requested comment from the Liberals.

But the notice states the government requires lodging for both individuals and large families for up to three months, beginning next month. The timing and the requirements strongly suggest a temporary refuge for people fleeing Syria's bloody civil war.

The sites must be self-contained, including energy generation, sewer, and waste management, and provide space for an information centre and offices for management personnel, among other requirements. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

PREPARATION

Saskatchewan to set up settlement centre

Days after Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said Ottawa should suspend its plan to bring in 25,000 Syrian refugees, his province will establish a refugee settlement centre to co-ordinate the arrival of refugees. Wall said it's important to ensure refugees make a successful transition to Canada. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

CELEBRITY

Trudeau making fans swoon

Justin Trudeau was mobbed by a crowd of several hundred shrieking fans at the APEC summit in Manila, Philippines, in a scene more fitting a rock star than a political leader.

The celebrity appeal of Canada's new prime minister was on full display Thursday as men and women crowded around Trudeau, hoping for a glimpse, a handshake and a snippet of video on their phones.

"He so handsome," said one young fan. "He's like Superman," said another.

His appeal to local residents appeared to have little to do with his government policies or his famous father. Instead, it seemed they just like his looks.

"He makes us swoon," said Chin-Chin Domingo, who used the Tagalog word "kilig" to describe Trudeau's effects on the crowd. "It's butterflies in the stomach. That's how we feel."

Jono Lyn Cadayong was exuberant after getting a handshake from Trudeau.

"I'm speechless," she said. "He has nice eyes. I will not wash my hand."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau greets the public in Manila on Thursday. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Saudis try to unite Syrian opposition

MILITARY RESPONSE

Earlier summit failed to select groups to leave out of ceasefire

Saudi Arabia will host a conference in mid-December to try to unite the Syrian opposition ahead of new peace talks, a key issue in efforts to end the nearly five-year civil war, the country's UN ambassador said Thursday.

Saudi Ambassador Abdallah Al-Moualimi said his country will be trying to bring different strands of the opposition "together for a united voice."

Last Saturday, foreign ministers from about 20 nations agreed in Vienna to an ambitious yet incomplete plan that sets a Jan. 1 deadline for the start of negotiations between Syrian President Bashar Assad's government and opposition groups. Within six months, the negotiations are to establish a "credible, inclusive and non-sectarian" transitional government that would set a schedule for drafting a new constitution and holding a free and fair UN-supervised election within 18 months.

Neither the Syrian government nor opposition groups were present at the talks, which brought together the main foreign backers of both sides.

Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy for Syria who represented the UN at the Vienna talks, told reporters that a ceasefire in Syria is now more likely because the countries participating in talks in Vienna "have an interest in seeing a ceasefire taking place."

> **If we want peace, we have to find a way of getting along with Assad.**
> Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo

In Vienna, the foreign ministers failed to reach consensus on which groups — other than the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and al-Qaida affiliates — would not be eligible to be part of a ceasefire. Jordan was chosen to oversee a process that would identify which groups could be considered for identification as terrorists.

De Mistura said the Vienna participants want "as large as possible a ceasefire" and that the ministers agreed to disagree about a number of issues — including about the future of Assad. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Syrian President Bashar Assad GETTY IMAGES

ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Closed borders in Balkan countries create pileups

Migrants wait to cross the Greece-Macedonia border, near the village of Idomeni on Thursday. SAKIS MITROLIDIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Most nations along Europe's refugee corridor shut their borders Thursday to those not coming from war-torn countries such as Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq, leaving thousands of others seeking a better life in the continent stranded at Balkan border crossings.

The overnight decision triggered the domino effect that both asylum-seekers and European nations had feared given the record number of people fleeing to Europe this year, and new fears after the deadly Paris attacks of possible militants coming in with refugees.

Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia weren't allowing in the so-called economic migrants whose countries aren't shattered by armed struggles and wars.

In the Greek village of Idomeni at the border with Macedonia, police said the border has essentially been shut down to all since Thursday morning. Some 3,000 people are waiting at a camp nearby that provides temporary shelter for those heading north through the Balkans.

About 500 people from Iran, Morocco and Algeria gathered on the border line between Greece and Macedonia to protest the closure. As a result, nobody else from the nationalities that Macedonia is letting through — Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis — were able to cross.

> **We're trapped. They won't let my family across. We have no money, and we're waiting without any idea of what is to happen.**
> Afghan Mohammed Mirzam

Dariush Yazdani, 25, from Tehran, said he was determined to reach Germany, and faced imprisonment were he to return to Iran.

"I will never go back," he said.

Mohammed Mirzam, 30, from Afghanistan knows he will be let through, but his wife and two children, Ilia, 5, and Elena, 3, are Iranian nationals and will not.

"We're trapped," he said, from the Greek side of the border, at Idomeni. "They won't let my family across. We have no money, and we're waiting without any idea of what is to happen."

On the Serbian border with Macedonia, the Serbs were letting in only migrants from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. And on the Croatia-Serbia border, Croats were only accepting people from those three countries plus the Palestinian territories.

Slovenia — the next country in the chain — also said it has been turning back the so-called economic migrants.

"This is going to be definitely a challenging situation," UN refugee agency spokeswoman in Serbia Melita Sunjic said. "UNHCR does not think that there is any nation that can be excluded from international protection based on their nationalities, but each case individually should be screened and processed based on the merits of the case." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TERRORISM

Female suicide bombers exist, too

The woman who blew herself up with an explosive vest in a suburban Paris apartment during a police operation Wednesday was far from the world's first female suicide bomber.

In the Palestinian territories, about a dozen women have carried out suicide attacks against Israelis since 2002 — including 27-year-old paramedic Wafa Idris, who blew herself up in downtown Jerusalem on Jan. 27, 2002. It was unclear if she planned to commit suicide.

Kurdish women have carried out several suicide attacks in Turkey since the 1980s, as have female members of leftist groups in their campaign against the government. The most recent attack occurred on Jan. 6, when a Turkish leftist group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at an Istanbul police station that killed an officer and wounded another.

Two female suicide bombers from Chechnya — belonging to a group known as the "black widows" in Russia — were to blame for the 2010 bombings of the Moscow metro, which killed some 40 people.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Iranian students fill in registration forms indicating their readiness to carry out suicide attacks.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

French gendarmes enforce the **Vigipirate plan**, France's national security alert system, throughout Paris. France revealed on Nov. 19 it will spend an extra 600 million euros ($641 million US) next year to ramp up security after the Paris attacks. President Francois Hollande announced this week that France is freezing plans to cut troop numbers through 2019. At the same time, the country will add 8,500 law enforcement jobs including 5,000 new police. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Opera brings warmth to France's dark hour

Paris

Toronto-based performers set for opening of Versailles show

Marco Chown Oved
IN PARIS

Barely 48 hours after the horrifying attacks in Paris, members of Toronto's Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Opera Atelier dance company faced a very difficult choice.

Their presentation of Jean-Baptiste Lully's 17th-century opera, Armide, was scheduled to go forward at the Chateau de Versailles just outside Paris, but the companies weren't going to force anyone to get on the plane.

Overcoming their fears, in a show of solidarity, and as a measure of their professionalism, every single one of the 75 musicians, dancers and technicians boarded that flight.

"When we started hearing the news, it was panic in the early hours, the borders are closed and a state of emergency. Everyone was concerned," said ballet dancer Jennifer Nichols.

> **"I think everyone, unanimously ... said we're doing this together**
> Ballet dancer Jennifer Nichols

"But once we heard that the company was moving forward with the tour ... we wanted to be in solidarity with the French people."

"There was a lot of trepidation," agreed Lucas Harris, who plays a type of lute called a theorbo. "But everyone else was going and we didn't want to let them down."

Harris and his wife, Geneviève Gilardeau, who plays violin in the orchestra, went one step further than most of their colleagues: they also brought their four-year-old daughter, Daphnée.

"All the extra security makes us a little uncomfortable," said Harris. But in the week of rehearsals since their arrival, they haven't regretted the choice.

The Toronto performers are now ready for opening night Friday, a performance that's being dedicated to the victims at the Bataclan concert hall.

INTELLIGENCE

Chemical weapons threaten the West

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group is aggressively pursuing development of chemical weapons, setting up a branch dedicated to research and experiments with the help of scientists from Iraq, Syria and elsewhere in the region, according to Iraqi and U.S. intelligence officials.

Their quest raises an alarming scenario for the West, given the determination to strike major cities that the group showed with its bloody attack last week in Paris. U.S. intelligence officials don't believe ISIL has the capability to develop sophisticated weapons like nerve gas that are most suited for a terrorist attack on a civilian target. So far the group has used mustard gas on the battlefield in Iraq and Syria.

Still, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls on Thursday warned that Islamic extremists might at some point use chemical or biological weapons.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

ISIL striving for reactions

ISIL has dramatically expanded its theatre of operations from its hub in Syria and Iraq, executing or inspiring a series of attacks across three continents that claimed more than 800 lives this year. The mayhem created by those attacks attracts the kind of attention that the extremist group thrives on. ISIL seeks to boost its credentials with acts of violence that attract recruits. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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118 years to close pay gap: Report

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Study ranked Canada 30th out of 145 nations

Women around the world will earn less than men for the next 118 years if present trends in pay inequity persist, the World Economic Forum predicts.

The global pay gap between men and women closed by a mere 3 per cent over the past decade, noticeably stalling after 2009/2010, says the forum's annual Global Gender Gap report.

The slow progress means women are only now earning what men earned nearly a decade ago, $11,000 on average, the first year the Geneva-based non-profit foundation began tracking the data. Meanwhile, men's average pay has nearly doubled to $21,000 worldwide.

As the global economy becomes increasingly automated, "we need to create a world where women's contributions and ideals are as valued as those of men," said Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the forum, best known for its annual meeting of global leaders in Davos, Switzerland.

The report, which also looks at women's progress in education, health and political empowerment, found Canada ranked 30th out of the 145 nations surveyed.

Around the world, the Nordic nations remain the most gender-equal societies, led by Iceland, Norway and Finland, ranking first, second and third, the World Economic Forum said. The least equitable are Syria, Pakistan and Yemen, ranking 143rd, 144th and 145th respectively, the forum's report found.

One seemingly counter-intuitive ranking went to the African nation of Rwanda, which came in 6th. Much of it is due to the Rwanda genocide of 1994, which devastated the male population, leaving women to run the country.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE, WITH FILES FROM THE CANADIAN PRESS

ON BOARD

Largest one-year jump in female representation

Women hold 19.5 per cent of the seats on the boards of Canada's biggest companies, up from 17.1 per cent in 2014, says the Canadian Board Diversity Council. It's the largest one-year increase in female representation on the boards of FP500 companies since 2001. The rise follows introduction of a new "comply or explain" policy that forces publicly traded companies to disclose statistics on women on their boards. THE CANADIAN PRESS

NOW THAT'S SOME BLING SECOND-LARGEST DIAMOND FOUND Vancouver-based mining company Lucara Diamond Corp. says it has unearthed the second-largest gem quality diamond ever, and the largest discovered in over a century, at its Karowe Mine in Botswana. The 1,111-carat diamond, pictured above, measures 65 millimetres by 56 mm by 40 mm — a rock weighing half a pound that's a little smaller than a tennis ball. Only the Cullinan diamond, weighing 3,106 carats — close to 1½ pounds — and measuring over 10 centimetres in length, beats the diamond found by Lucara. COURTESY LUCARA DIAMOND CORP/THE CANADIAN PRESS

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FOREIGN POLICY

Trudeau makes his mark

Canada's new prime minister departed Thursday from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Manila, closing his first act on the international stage — trailed by a squealing mob of young Filipino journalists and volunteers and questions about whether any of it might be good for his broader foreign policy goals.

One of the things Justin Trudeau talked about a lot at this summit was the need to put Canada on the front lines of the fight against climate change.

Earlier in the day, that won him plaudits from U.S. President Barack Obama.

But Obama put the squeeze on Trudeau. The president said that the U.S. and Canada are "both soon to be signatories" to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Trudeau has said he wants to consult with Canadians and Parliament before moving forward on the Pacific Rim trade pact. But Obama told this summit he wants countries to move swiftly towards ratification.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Justin Trudeau addresses a news conference in Manila, Thursday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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ROOIBOS HARVEST

Drought in Africa hits red lattes, teas

From frothy red lattes to rust-coloured teas, popular rooibos drinks will likely become scarcer and more expensive because of a widespread drought in South Africa, including in scrubland where the rooibos plant normally flourishes.

A devastated rooibos harvest may lead to a 90 per cent price increase, a trade council said on Thursday. The U.S. is one of the biggest importers of rooibos tea. There was little rainfall during the July and August planting months which could cause the worst harvest in years, the South African Rooibos Council said in a statement.

Farmers will only know the extent of their losses in the first half of 2016 when the volume of the final harvest is known, said council spokesman Ernest du Toit.

South Africa is the only region where the rooibos plant grows naturally.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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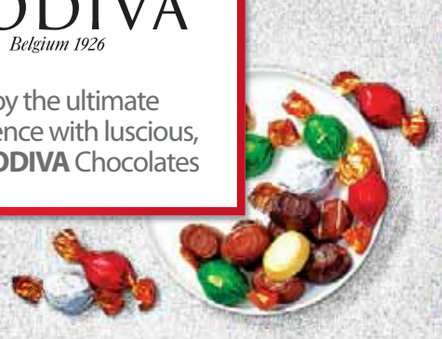

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ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

You can't help but want a towering figure in feminism like Gloria Steinem to have the best chat of her life, chatting with you. But damn, are you lucky that she's chatting to you at all.

I think I screwed up with Gloria Steinem. She was great. She was (is) interesting, and thoughtful and kind. Also: At ease.

But I was trying far too hard. Maybe it was over-reading all things by and for her, or marking her new book My Life on the Road, using "sign here" stickies at my favourite parts, as if I'd have time to touch on them all, worrying how to ask questions she'd never heard before.

Of course, Steinem doesn't need any interviewer to be interesting.

I began by thanking her for her decades of activism.

"Well, you know, I feel the same thankfulness to all the people who woke me up," she said. "It's like a chain, and it just goes on and on, which is the good news."

Many of the people who "woke her up" are detailed in her memoir, a personal history of second-wave feminism from the vanguard, a meditation on the act of listening, a book rich with characters she meets on the road, in planes, taxis and trains, in India, the U.S. and Canada. They teach her and buoy her and offer her hope, and I asked if we all need to travel to get that feeling of optimism.

But she said the road can be a state of mind: "When you leave your house in the morning, just being open to accident makes a big difference. Take those moments in the elevator, when nobody's talking but everybody's thinking the same thing, or whatever the immediate spontaneous moment is, and going with it to see what happens."

GLORIA'S GLAMOUR It's impossible not to get star-struck around feminist leader Gloria Steinem, writes Rosemary Westwood of their wide-ranging conversation. GETTY IMAGES

You might, like Steinem, discover your garbage man is your best political adviser.

I told her I see schisms among feminists by race, and she pointed to how the media and some scholars put the social-justice movement into silos, when "What's missing is the understanding of organic connections. It's not possible in any practical way, much less idealistic way, to be a feminist without being anti-racist," she said. Women suffer from both categories, and "in an even deeper way you can't perpetuate race or caste, as in India, or class, without controlling reproduction."

But are we — young feminists — doing enough to listen to each other, and be broad-minded?

No one's all that great at it, she said with a little laugh.

"I think young women are by and large better at it than older ones, because they're more conscious of the connections, because they've grown up with more connections."

"Racism is a prison for white folks who are culturally deprived," she added. "You have to get mad on your own behalf: 'How dare this society tell me who my friends are and where I live?' I think you become a more trustworthy ally when you see your own enlightened self-interest in it."

What most concerns her right now, she said, is global violence against women: Infanticides that led to a planet with more men than women, underage pregnancy causing teenage death, sexualized violence and domestic violence.

And she argued that the issue of violence against women should play a central role in foreign policy, too.

If western governments want to separate moderate groups from extremists to find allies in Syria, "the most reliable way of deciding that is attitudes toward women. If we had taken that seriously, we would not have aided the mujahideen, who turned into the Taliban in Afghanistan, for instance."

The only politician advocating that strategy, she said, is Hillary Clinton. Steinem writes in her book that the U.S. wasn't ready to have a woman head of state in 2008 because we, and especially men, "feel regressed to childhood when we see powerful women."

And now?

"I'm not sure." Maybe Clinton's own time as secretary of state has helped, she said, but it will be a "very tough campaign."

At one point, Steinem painted an image of the future that answered my worries that things can't change: "If we raised one generation of children without violence and without shaming and labels and, you know, race, gender roles and so on, we don't know what might be possible."

When I hung up, my mind created an alternate interview: I laughed when she laughed, instead of being too nervous, pleasantness gave way to firecrackers. You can't help but want a towering figure in feminism like Steinem to have the best chat of her life, chatting with you. But damn, are you lucky that she's chatting to you at all.

It's not possible in any practical way, much less idealistic way, to be a feminist without being anti-racist.
Gloria Steinem

THE BIG THING: POLITICS & PERSONAL SPACE

He's the Prime Minister of PDA. But are Justin Trudeau's touchy-feely tendencies a weird habit or a successful strategy?

Trudeau gets up close and personal with the U.S. president, bear-hugs premiers and soundly smooches his wife without apparent hesitation. Not to mention his habit of snuggly selfies with members of the public. But does it work?

Many Canadians enjoy getting hugs, even if they're too shy to give them in public, said University of Victoria psychology professor Robert Gifford, an

expert on personal space. "I would hazard a guess that (Trudeau's body language) works with many people, and in general is a good strategy, whether intended as a strategy or not," Gifford said.

The distance we prefer between ourselves and others varies by culture: People in the Middle East or Latin America, for example, tend to get a bit cosier than Europeans or Americans.

Etiquette expert Debby Mayne recommends a personal bubble of 120 centimetres between strangers, while one group of psychologists looking at norms of personal space used a benchmark of 64 centimetres for everyday conversation. (Violating this could indicate an autism spectrum disorder or a specific type of brain damage — no sign that applies to Trudeau).

Outside of intimate relationships, a distance of less than 45 centimetres typically makes North Americans nervous, "cross-eyed" and instinctively want to move away, according to the anthropology text The Hidden Dimension.

So, yes, Trudeau's in-your-face style "goes against the classical Canadian behaviour pattern," Gifford said. But that's not necessarily a bad thing: "Maybe we all need to hug a bit more."

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metro WEEKEND
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MOVIES MUSIC TELEVISION DIGITAL

JLaw is living up to the hype

CELEBRITY

Industry seeks next big thing, finds star with staying power

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

Jennifer Lawrence in a scene from Joy (left), by director David O. Russell, and Academy Award nominated Winter's Bone (right). HANDOUTS

Sometimes you just know.

In my line of work, hype and celebrity are occupational hazards. Every day my inbox is stuffed with news releases touting the Next! Big! Thing! You get numb to it after a while, but every now and again someone will come along you know is destined for something big.

Jennifer Lawrence wasn't a star the first time I met her but you could tell it would only be a matter of time until she was. It was 2010, years before she would win an Academy Award or be known internationally as Katniss Everdeen. She was a struggling newbie with just a handful of credits, but a great big buzz surrounding her performance in Winter's Bone. Her steely but vulnerable take on an Ozark girl who will do anything to keep her family together was garnering good reviews and the usual phrases like "breakout performance" were being thrown around, but this time it felt different. Real.

I was asked to host a question-and-answer period with her after a screening of the film at a theatre in Toronto, but first we planned a quick dinner with a publicist at a nearby hotel. I've eaten with a lot actors who order a piece of steamed fish, no butter, no oil and then, rather than actually put it in their mouth, simply move it around the plate until the waiter takes it away.

Not Jennifer Lawrence. She ordered a steak dinner with sides and ate it all while showing us a cell phone snap of her costume for the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo audition. As she chatted, laughed and enjoyed dinner, it was apparent what she wasn't. She wasn't precious or overwhelmed at being on the cusp of something big. She was doing something rare in this business — being herself and enjoying the ride. In other words the woman you now see photobombing Taylor Swift on red carpets or starring in this weekend's The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2 is the real deal, someone completely at ease with herself in a business that doesn't usually allow for that.

Later, on the way to the theatre, she opted not to take the provided limo. Instead we walked down Bloor Street. It was on the chilly side, so she draped my suit jacket over her shoulders. Along the way her high heel caught in a crack in the pavement and snapped off. Rather than hobble down the street, she kicked off both shoes and walked barefoot the rest of the way, her broken designer shoes in hand.

At the theatre I don't remember what we talked about on stage. When I think back on the night I reflect on the sweet spot she was in, career-wise. She was about to become one of the youngest Oscar nominees ever for best actress in a leading role and yet there wasn't an ounce of pretension about her. Charisma? Yes. Talent? In spades.

I don't claim to have some sort of celebrity ESP, but that night I knew in my gut I had met a star, a feeling reaffirmed when I saw her carry the Hunger Games movies on her back and become a leading voice in the fight for pay equality for women in Hollywood.

Want to see a superstar? Watch the last scene of the Joy trailer. Shot on an iPhone as test footage it's a close-up of Lawrence's face as she fires off two shotgun rounds. "My name's Joy, by the way," she says. It's a simple image but a magnetic one. It's a movie star moment from the rare actor who commands our attention every time she's on screen. Sometimes you just know.

MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2	★★★★
Brooklyn	★★★★
The Night Before	★★★★
Man Up	★★

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Now playing

DRAMA/ACTION

The Hunger Games - Mockingjay 2

Director: Francis Lawrence
Starring: Jennifer Lawrence, Julianne Moore

With the nation of Panem in a full-scale war, Katniss confronts President Snow in the final showdown. Teamed with a group of other fighters, Katniss goes off on a mission to liberate the citizens of Panem.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 72% Audience: 99%

MYSTERY/SUSPENSE

Secret in their Eyes

Director: Billy Ray
Starring: Chiwetel Ejiofor, Julia Roberts

A tight-knit team of rising FBI investigators — Ray and Jess, along with their District Attorney supervisor Claire — is suddenly torn apart when they discover that Jess's teenage daughter has been brutally and inexplicably murdered.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 35% Audience: 62%

COMEDY

The Night Before

Director: Jonathan Levine
Starring: Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Seth Rogen

Ethan, Isaac, and Chris are friends. Their yearly Christmas Eve reunion has been an annual night of debauchery. But the tradition is coming to an end, and to make it memorable, they set out to find the Nutcracka Ball.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 66% Audience: 96%

DRAMA

Brooklyn

Director: John Crowley
Starring: Saoirse Ronan, Domhnall Gleeson

Eilis Lacey is a young Irish immigrant navigating her way through 1950s Brooklyn. Lured by the promise of America, Eilis departs Ireland for the shores of New York City. The initial shackles of homesickness quickly diminish as a fresh romance sweeps Eilis into the intoxicating charm of love.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 99% Audience: 96%

COMEDY

Man Up

Director: Ben Palmer
Starring: Simon Pegg

Nancy is done with dating; she's exhausted by the circus. So when Jack blindly mistakes her for his date, no one is more surprised than her when she does the unthinkable and just goes with it. It's going to take a night of pretending to be someone else for Nancy to be her honest, awesomely unconventional self.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 84% Audience: 71%

DOCUMENTARY

Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict

Director: Lisa Immordino Vreeland

This documentary is a portrait of a patron of the arts extraordinaire who transformed a modest fortune into one of the premiere collections of twentieth century modern art.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 91% Audience: 86%

DOCUMENTARY

Drone

Director: Tonje Hessen Schei
Starring: Shahzad Akbar, Noor Behram

This film follows people on both sides of the drone technology. The unique access to drone victims in Waziristan is juxtaposed to drone pilots who struggle to come to terms with the new warfare.

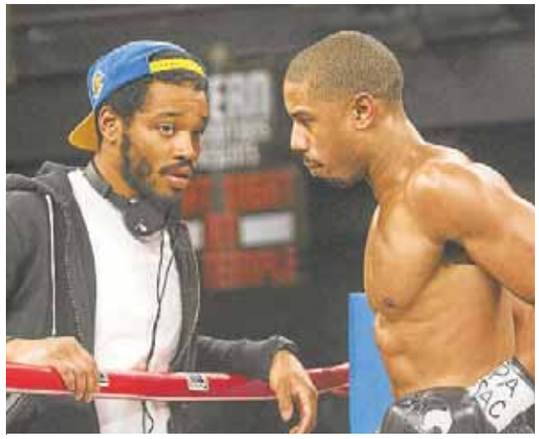
ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 86% Audience: 53%

Rocky returns for a new generation

CREED

How a director convinced Stallone to revisit franchise

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada



Director Ryan Coogler, left, talks to Michael B. Jordan who stars as Adonis Creed in Creed, which opens next Wednesday. Jordan says he's always looked at himself as an underdog and had to defeat odds to get what he wanted. HANDOUT

Like a lot of people director Ryan Coogler has a personal connection to the Rocky movies.

"Whenever I had a big test at school or a football game (my father would) say, 'Take 10 minutes and watch this scene from Rocky. That'll get you fired up. That'll give you the juice to score five touchdowns. Or get an A on that test.' I'd look over and think, 'Are we watching this for me or for you?'"

It's one thing to have the emotional connection; it's another to convince Sylvester Stallone to make a seventh Rocky movie.

"I think the most important thing was that this movie was following a different character's arc," said Coogler.

"Rocky is there in a role that's very important to the film but very much supports this other character's journey to find themselves. That was important because no matter how good the idea was he wasn't going to make another Rocky movie."

The result is Creed, the evolution of a story that began in 1976, 10 years before Coogler was born. Michael B. Jordan is Adonis Creed, the son of Apollo Creed, Rocky's old friend who died in the ring at the hands of Ivan Drago.

Born after his father's death, Adonis never knew his dad but seems to have inherited the old man's love of boxing and much of his skill, but can Rocky whip him into shape for a title match? Cue the underdog theatrics and signature swelling trumpet score.

"Creed is about a sense of identity," said Coogler, "which is what I think the first Rocky was but the other themes are what make this fresh. What happens to someone dealing with an absentee father? What does love look like in the millennial generation when women are just as career oriented as men, or are expected to be? This idea of a generational handoff, baby boomers handing off responsibility and jobs to millennials; what does that look like?"

It looks like Rocky 1.0, a new story for a new generation. "I was always honest with (Stallone) and let him know what the movies meant to me. I think he has an understanding that the movies kind of belong to everybody at this point."

STAR NOTES

Michael B. Jordan's love affair with Rocky

"The things that came to mind (while watching the Rocky films was) inspiration. Then this project came up and I had the chance to fall in love with the Rocky franchise all over again."

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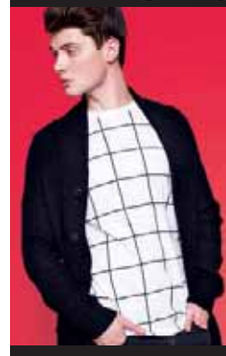

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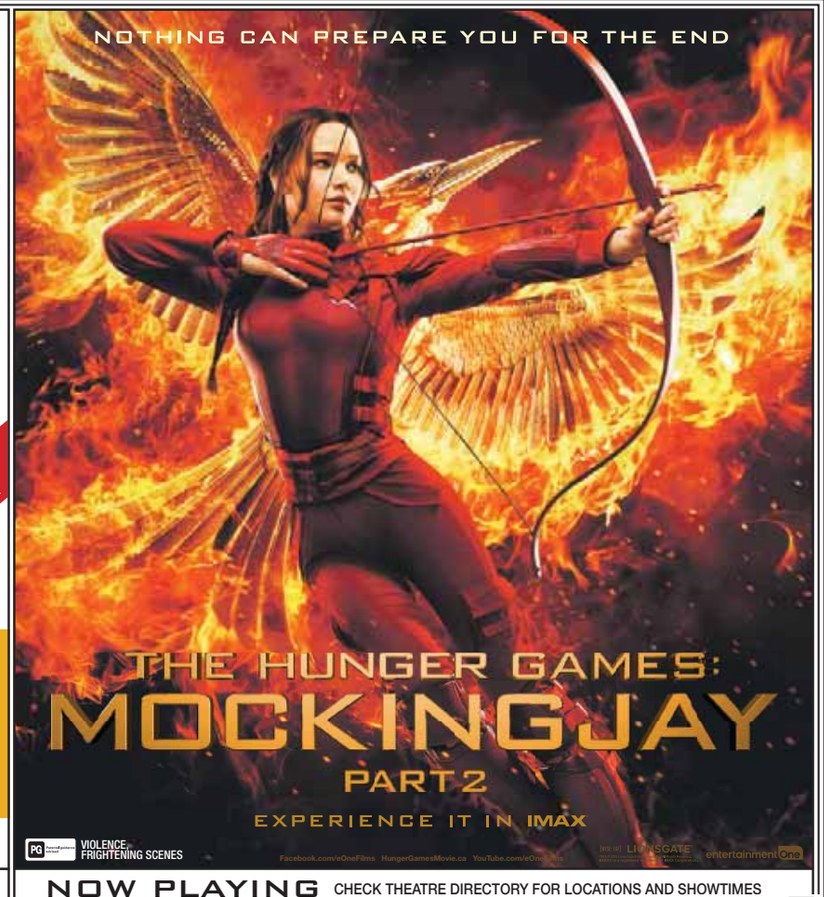

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When all your friends grow up

INTERVIEW

Jonathan Levine talks The Night Before

Matt Prigge
Metro | New York

The last time director Jonathan Levine made a movie with Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Seth Rogen, it was 50/50, a dramedy about cancer.

The Night Before is more lighthearted — sort of. It follows three friends (the other played by Anthony Mackie) doing their annual tradition of having a sloppy night in NYC on Christmas Eve. But this time the characters played by Rogen and Mackie feel they're too old and settled down to ever do it again, leaving Gordon-Levitt as the last hold-out. It's that anxiety that made Levine — who also made The Wackness and Warm Bodies — comfortable doing his first full-on comedy.

Seth Rogen and Anthony Mackie feel too old for getting sloppy on Christmas Eve anymore, but Joseph Gordon-Levitt is still game in The Night Before. HANDOUT

This is your second film with Seth Rogen, after 50/50. How did you two first meet?
On 50/50, there was another filmmaker who dropped out a couple months before. I was one of five people up for the gig. For whatever reason they liked me. I think it was because I made The Wackness and they thought I would smoke weed with them. (Laughs) But it was also because I spoke relatively intelligently about the material.

I've read you two have helped each other out on projects — that he helped look at Warm Bodies and you looked at This is the End.
Yeah, but it wasn't in any specific way. Seth and Evan continuously have people come in and look at their stuff. If I'm looking at This is the End, I'm one of 50 people who are looking at it. On Warm Bodies I definitely used that. The first time was on 50/50, where we thought we needed to have smart people look at it and tell us what's good and what's bad. Seth was one of those people. It's a culture of rigorous note-giving and improving the work.

You've done dramas or romances that were funny before, but you've never really made a full-on comedy.
It was a change of pace. And it certainly wouldn't have worked for me if at its heart there wasn't an undercurrent of drama. Having it fundamentally revolve around issues of friendship and getting older, that me more comfortable executing the comedy. I loved doing something whose primary goal was to make people laugh. You feel like you're throwing a party and your only goal is to make everyone has as much fun as possible.

Your sets sound very loose. You're not like Sam Peckinpah, drunkenly screaming at people.
No one screams at anybody. Well, I probably screamed on occasion. But generally everyone can bring their friend, everyone can brings their mom, everyone's welcome. When there's a very serious scene, of course it's not like that. It's very subdued. But if you were to see it, it would look like we're having fun.

Despite all the crazy things that happen in the film, it is rooted in a serious concern. Joseph Gordon-Levitt's Ethan hasn't gotten his stuff together, while his closest friends have, causing a disconnect.
When we were writing it, every single person had someone in mind who was that person in their life. We talked about why that person was not succeeding. There were many reasons. For a lot of us, the reason we've succeeded is talent, but also a lot of luck, so it's s—y to look at the friend who hasn't been so lucky. But the truth is a lot of it is luck. We settled on giving (Ethan) a trauma he's never been able to move past. That happens to a lot of people, whether it's someone who got stuck in a job for too long and looked up one day and his friends were more successful than him or her, or someone just got knocked down and took too long getting back up.

How conscious were you of playing with holiday movie conventions?
I imagined it as a Christmas movie for people who didn't celebrate traditional Christmases, whether because you're Jewish or from another non-Christian religion or your parents are divorced or you hate your parents. There are lot of people who feel left out of the traditional Christmas. I would go out in New York do stuff like this on Christmas Eve. There were a lot of Christian people, there were a lot of Jews. It was all people who had a reason for not celebrating the traditional Christmas. It's nice because Christmas is an oppressive, monolithic thing.

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Bridging 13 years in adaptation

INTERVIEW

Chiwetel Ejiofor talks making a film American

Ned Ehrbar
Metro | Hollywood

Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman and Chiwetel Ejiofor star in Secret in Their Eyes. HANDOUT

For The Secret in Their Eyes, Chiwetel Ejiofor teams up with Nicole Kidman and Julia Roberts — and takes on a unique acting challenge: playing the same character during two distinct periods of his life 13 years apart. And while a little gray in the temples helps, Ejiofor found some unique ways to distinguish the two versions of himself.

What was it about this character that interested you?
I liked the idea of dealing with this character in two different time periods, thereby being able to reflect and engage with the obsessional qualities that he has. I'm sure it's a part of his character anyway, but these circumstances that he's in kind of highlight his propensity to become obsessed. It becomes a very interesting story about this guy's psychology, the demons at play within him. I was really excited about exploring all of those things.

That gap between the two periods is interesting. Did you do any work for yourself as far as what his life was like in between?
Yeah, I mean, building a sort of background for him and what his life was — his romantic life and his professional life — and just sort of filling in the gaps of that was really helpful. But the main event for him is that there's like a sound that he can't get rid of. I thought of it as almost literal, almost kind of something a ringing sound that he could never escape. He has the knowledge that the only way he'll ever get past or get through it is by finding the guy who did the thing.

If you're imagining an actual ringing in your ears, does that drive you crazy by the end of the shoot?
(laughs) Yeah, I mean if it were to really manifest. But you know, yeah, it's obviously metaphorical but there's definitely a sense of that with him. And that's why I think when he starts to confront the guy, it just takes on its own quality.

Did you watch the original Argentinean film?
No, I didn't. I didn't see it beforehand. I've seen it since. I felt like it was going to be interesting to me to be able to take a look at it afterward. What I always suspected was that the films would be very different because an American version of an Argentinean film, I think, just sort of culturally comes from a different place and would therefore go down a totally different avenue. And I think that's true of the film, that they become kind of cousins in a way. They're not directly related. They follow some of the same narrative principles, but the characters exist in totally different universes.

Can you pinpoint a cultural difference between an American and Argentinean version of a story?
In a sense, in the Argentinean version, there's something quite delicate and tender in the center of it that is slightly different from the Americanized version of the film, which is quite muscular, you know? And has a slightly different feel to it. It's quite different. I think both things work, but I don't think they could be overlapped. I don't think you could make an American version of the film that could sustain that kind of tenderness.

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Saoirse steps into role she's lived

PERIOD DRAMA

Coming-of age part plays into her own growth, says Brooklyn star

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

Hollywood has never been an easy place to carve out a career — especially for child actors growing up in front of the camera. So it's particularly remarkable how smoothly Saoirse Ronan has maneuvered the maelstrom of the movie biz since entering it at just nine years old.

"I never played kid roles and I had never been in kid films so I always just thought of myself as an actor," reasoned the now 21-year-old actress whose acclaimed oeuvre includes The Lovely Bones and The Grand Budapest Hotel. "But until now, it was tricky to showcase that you were ready to move on to that next step of taking on roles that were a little bit more mature and where you're more at, personally."

That's why her latest offering, Brooklyn, was such an important role for the Irish-American actor. Based on Colm Tóibín's award-winning best-seller (which U.K. newspaper The Guardian named as "one of the ten best historical novels"), the 1950s-set drama follows the story of an Irish immigrant who flees to New York in search of work and must struggle with new loves and a life on her own as a young adult.

"What's particularly fresh about this story is that it's told from a woman's point of view and that's something that's missing from all of the accounts in the Irish canon of immigration," explained director John Crowley. "If you got that specific story right, then you'd have the scale to carry hundreds, thousands and millions of stories with it. It's sort of a keyhole drama in that way."

While that period of history remains scarce on testimony, Ronan insists she didn't necessarily rely on research to assume the character. Instead the acting approach that garnered Ronan an Oscar nomination in 2008 for Atonement has "very much stayed based on instinct" — something that also informed her latest coming-of-age portrayal.

"As you get older and you have more life experience, that does come into play when you play a character," admitted Ronan. "This was less of a journey to step into that place because I was already there."

"What's particularly fresh about this story is that it's told from a woman's point of view ... something that's missing from all of the accounts in the Irish canon of immigration.
Director John Crowley

Saoirse Ronan plays an Irish immigrant in 1950s New York in Brooklyn, adapted from Colm Tóibín's bestselling novel. CONTRIBUTED

THREE THINGS

Ronan as chameleon
The first time I interviewed Saoirse Ronan she was 15 years old and the veteran of six movies. I had always admired her performances and as I walked into the interview suite I congratulated her on the film.

"T'anks pure much," she said with an Irish lilt that could charm the label off a bottle of Jameson Whiskey.

It was the first time I had heard her natural accent and confirmed what I already knew: that she was a chameleon with a propensity for accents that could give Meryl Streep a run for her money.

This weekend in Brooklyn she drops the drawls to play an Irish girl who immigrates to New York in the 1950s.

In what part of Ireland was she born? Despite her Irish accent, she was actually born in the Bronx in 1994.

"(My parents) went to New York in the '80s. There was a really bad recession in Ireland at the time. A lot of young people went to New York because that's our trek, that's our journey. The Irish always go to New York or somewhere on the East Coast."

Monica Ronan and Paul Ronan lived in New York for 11 years in total, moving back to County Carlow, Ireland when Saoirse was three years old.

Can she beat me up? Probably. To play teenage assassin Hanna she studied knife fighting, stick fighting, martial arts and learned how to shoot a gun. She performed most of her own stunts in the film and says if she was ever offered the action-star role of James Bond she would happily accept. "That tux? I could totally rock it." RICHARD CROUSE/METRO

THE TV DINNER JESSICA ALLEN

To spoon or not to spoon? Those born in Italy were adamant that it's frowned upon.

I was confused after I watched Brooklyn during TIFF. It wasn't the plot — a young Irish woman, Ellis (Saoirse Ronan), must not only choose between her homeland (Ireland) and the country to which she recently immigrated (America) but also between two young men who inhabit those disparate worlds separated by the Atlantic. I think it was purely a case of disbelief: Did I just sit through an entire contemporary film without spotting a single superhero? Without any overt violence, villains, sex and scandal? Was this simply a tender movie, rich with '50s period detail, about the isolation of the immigrant experience; about love, loss and growing up?

Yes, it was. And I expected the critics would hate the film, which hits theatres Friday, for being overly sentimental. But they are nearly unanimously enchanted. It's a "gorgeous movie about love and the idea that you can't go home," said Indiewire, who also suggests that Ronan is "a sure bet for a best actress nomination."

With a single glance, the 21-year-old actress can so convincingly convey what homesickness looks and feels like that I ached to call my parents. I also became so invested in the difficult decisions her character has to make that my heart raced as though I was watching a thriller.

There was one decision, however, that I questioned. Ellis' den mother, played by the illimitable Julie Walters, helps her practise eating spaghetti, a delicacy that's she's never tried, to prepare Ellis for dinner with the family of her Italian-American boyfriend, Tony.

THE MOVIE: Brooklyn

THE MEAL: Spaghetti and meatballs

Ellis knocks their socks off, as she deftly uses her spoon to twirl the noodles around her forks' tines — just like they do.

Now, there will be two responses to the above observation: Some of you won't bat an eyelash while others will be incredulous: no respecting Italian past the age of five uses a spoon to eat spaghetti.

To spoon or not to spoon? That is the question I posed to friends. Those born in Italy were adamant that it's frowned upon. Plus, they said, you will never be given a spoon for a pasta course at a restaurant in their motherland. Others — including mangiacakes, like me, and second or third generation Italian-Canadians — spoon away. One friend told me that her parents, second generation Italians, used the spoons for noodle-twirling — that is until they travelled back to their tiny home village in Calabria, where spoons were for soup, not spaghetti.

Could it be that when Italians immigrated to North America, not only their food metamorphosed, gracing us with dishes like pepperoni pizza, penne alla vodka and chicken parmigiana, but also their table etiquette did, too?

After getting lost in culinary history — the invention, popularization and industrialization of pasta — I can't be certain. But Miss Manners has a strong opinion on the matter: "In the civilized world, which includes the United States and Italy," she wrote in 2005, "it is incorrect to eat spaghetti with a spoon."

No matter, because all my research made me hungry for what could arguably be Italian Americans' greatest contribution to modern civilization: spaghetti and meatballs. (In Italy, meatballs, or polpette, are served on their own, not in "Sunday gravy.") So, after whipping some up, we devoured huge bowls of it while watching The Godfather II, obviously. No spoons were required.

Jessica Allen is the digital correspondent on CTV's The Social.

FILM BRIEF

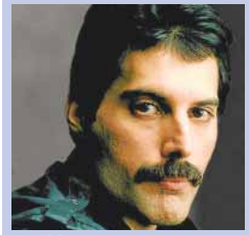
Stalled Freddie Mercury biopic may yet rock us

A long-gestating Hollywood biopic of Queen singer Freddie Mercury may have a new chance at hitting the screen, with a new screenwriter hired to work on the project.

Sacha Baron Cohen had initially been slated to play the singer but dropped out in 2013, and a year later, the film lost its director.

Now, Deadline reports that the Oscar-nominated scribe behind The Theory of Everything, Anthony McCarten, is taking a crack at the screenplay.

Once the screenplay is written, studio Sony will read the script and have the possibility of opting in. AFP



Freddy Mercury
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

1950S HOLLYWOOD

John Goodman talks Trumbo

John Goodman teams up with Bryan Cranston and director Jay Roach for Trumbo, starring as Frank King, the inelegant B-movie mogul who kept Dalton Trumbo (Cranston) working after he was blacklisted from Hollywood in the 1950s. And Goodman doesn't think we've come that far since then.

How familiar were you with Dalton Trumbo's story?
I was drawn to the people from the Group Theater in New York, and a lot of them went on to become very famous acting teachers but then a lot of them also joined the Communist party. So I knew about blacklisting from what had happened to them, and I knew about the Hollywood 10 — not in a lot of great detail. I'd admired Dalton Trumbo but, my God, I had no idea he was as prolific as he was.

It almost seems strange now how much people freaked out over Communism.
It doesn't seem strange to me at all, and it doesn't seem like we've learned our lessons very well. People are very good at manipulating fear for their own ends and for power. ... And these days of social media, it's becoming tribal, almost — the group-shaming of people, beating up on people. It's very good at turning individuals into mobs — "this is what's right to think, this is what's correct." And people aren't afraid to use death threats now and really, really hateful speech. Doesn't seem like we've learned a lot.

NED EHRBAR/METRO HOLLYWOOD

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Speaking up only start of recovery

Swift Current blends the stories of former NHL player Sheldon Kennedy and younger victims who came forward after one of Kennedy's public talks. It airs Saturday on Global at 9 p.m. ET/PT.
HANDOUT

DOCUMENTARY

Ex-NHL player still battles demons of sexual abuse

Liz Brown
Metro | Canada

It's been almost 20 years since former NHL player Sheldon Kennedy came forward with his story of sexual abuse at the hands of former Swift Current Broncos head coach Graham James.

In the years that followed, more victims shared their stories, James was jailed and Kennedy held up as a hero as he rollerbladed across Canada to raise money and awareness for sexual abuse victims.

Kennedy thought his disclosure would bring him peace, but the pain and trauma from those early years still haunted him as he battled alcoholism and cocaine addiction and had stints in jail.

At one point he found himself sitting with a gun, contemplating suicide.

"I think one of the biggest myths out there is once you tell your story, it's over," says Kennedy.

Swift Current, a new documentary about Kennedy and the struggles of sex abuse victims, aims to dispel that myth.

"This film paints a very visceral and cinematic portrait of how difficult it is to recover from sexual abuse trauma," says the doc's director Joshua Rofé. At first, Rofé says that Kennedy was reticent to work with him on the film, as he felt his story had already been told and there was nothing more to say.

But as their focus sharpened, they realized the story wasn't just Kennedy's, but a broader look at the healing journey.

"I think that this doc is told in a way of how the issues have evolved," says Kennedy, comparing The Sheldon Kennedy Story — the documentary about his life made in the late '90s — to Swift Current.

"If we look at the film that was made 17 years ago, it was just telling a story that showed this stuff happens, but I think we're at a point now where I believe (Swift Current) talks about solution. It's about hope," he says.

> **This film paints a very visceral and cinematic portrait of how difficult it is to recover from sexual abuse trauma.**
> Director Joshua Rofé

Threaded through Kennedy's own recovery are the stories of two 21-year-old victims who spoke up at one of Kennedy's public talks at Durham College in Oshawa, Ont.

In front of 300 people, they told their own stories of abuse and asked Kennedy for help.

"These kids were dying to speak up," says Rofé, who felt compelled to include them in the documentary.

Rofé shows Kennedy sharing his story and helping these young victims deal with the aftermath of their abuse.

"The great comparison that Josh has made in this film is between them — they're 21 — and me, who's been grinding away trying to get healthy for 20 years; the two different places of recovery," says Kennedy.

Today, Kennedy is clean and works to advocate for better child protection policies in Canada and the U.S. and is the lead director at the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in Calgary.

But he admits his recovery still requires day-to-day work.

"It's about having tools," he says.

"For me, that's attending meetings and advocacy, working out, and heading out to my farm to ground myself."

"What I'm good at is pushing for change and listening to the grassroots and pushing at the top to make things happen," he says.

metro TRAVEL
Your essential daily news

Online tour offers free virtual glimpse inside Dubai's luxury Burj Al Arab hotel

Sarah Silverman's New York

DAY IN THE LIFE

Comedian talks her favourite hangouts and pastimes

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

Sarah Silverman may have grown up in New Hampshire, but the popular comedian certainly relates more to New York — in particular Lower Manhattan, where she blossomed as an edgy standup comic. While her upcoming, critically acclaimed drama I Smile Back and a new HBO comedy special (premiering Nov. 23) have kept her busy lately, Silverman always gets back to the city that makes her "heart just swell." We caught up to uncover her ideal day in The Big Apple.

Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village is the ideal spot for people-watching. ISTOCK

Brunch at the deli

Begin your day with a late-morning brunch at B&H Dairy (facebook.com/BHDairy-KosherRestaurant) — an East Village staple for more than seven decades.

"It's a tiny hole-in-the-wall," laughs Silverman, of her go-to daytime diner. "They have the best soup, the best challah bread and it's a kosher deli. I have no religion at all, but I am a vegetarian so it's the only matzo ball soup I can eat because it's not made with chicken fat."

The Comedy Cellar is like my home, I love it.

Walk in the park

"My favourite thing to do in the world is just walking the streets of New York," admits Silverman. But nowhere is patrolling the pavement better-suited than nearby Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village (washingtonsquareparkconservancy.org).

Notably renowned for the iconic 123-year-old Washington Square Arch, this gorgeous urban garden plays host to everyone from students to street performers to chess enthusiasts, making the historical square once known for public executions now the ideal spot for people-watching.

Dinner with Frank

A mere 12-minute stroll back into the East Village will land you at Silverman's favourite supper stop. A small, uncompromising eatery, Frank (frankrestaurant.com) boasts an astonishing wine list and serves up authentic Italian entrees like Rigatoni al Ragu for a reasonable price.

"It's loud, it's small, you can't have any adjustments on your order (and) it's cash only — it's one of those places," says Silverman. "But it is the best Italian food in New York City."

Laugh the night away

Make your way back to Greenwich Village to finish your evening rolling in the cramped aisles of Silverman's favourite comedy club.

"The Comedy Cellar (comedycellar.com) is like my home, I love it," explained Silverman of the legendary basement bar where one can often catch surprise sets by the likes of Chris Rock or Louis CK.

Afterwards, Silverman suggests winding down around the corner at their sister club The Village Underground. After all, "that's where all the comics hang out."

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TRAVEL NOTES ICY ADVENTURE, ISLAND PARTY, BIG DETOX

Hot cold trend
The sweater crowd never had it so good. Exodus Travels has a new collection of 50 cold-weather journeys to winter wonderlands around the world, from Norway to Italy to Bulgaria. Choose from ski trips, wildlife safaris, snowshoe treks, glacier hikes, UNESCO sites and more, staying in log cabins, mountain lodges and cozy igloos. Visit exodustravels.com/winter-holidays.

Mt. Hengill, Iceland. CONTRIBUTED

Jump-up time
Why not work the biggest carnival in the Caribbean into your sun holiday this year? Trinidad's Carnival sees Port of Spain throwing a massive two-day street parade Feb. 8 and 9, with plenty of pre-festival activity. And when the last soca song has been sung, take the 25-minute flight to Tobago and sit on the beach for a few days. Not a bad plan. Visit GoTrinidadandTobago.com.

Party it up in Port of Spain. CONTRIBUTED

Luxury boot camp
With a 35 per cent return rate, they must be doing something right. The Ranch at Live Oak is a weeklong fitness and wellness program that restores mind and body in the hills above Malibu, Calif. Go for big hikes, take fitness classes, eat organic plant-based meals and sink into the spa amenities. Get a full detox and you're ready for 2016. Visit TheRanchMalibu.com. DOUG WALLACE

The Ranch at Live Oak, Malibu. CONTRIBUTED

Water sports to whiskey in Dublin

IRELAND

Discover the historically rich city's rebirth in 72 hours

Morgan Dunlop
For Metro Canada

The rooftop bar and terrace of The Marker Hotel in the Docklands district. THE MARKER HOTEL

Dublin is as steeped in tradition and charm as it is brimming with innovation, fuelled by a steadily growing economy and a slew of young entrepreneurs infusing the city with fresh ideas. Here's how to get the most out of Dublin, from the past to the present.

SUP (standup paddleboard) around Ireland's Eye with Pure Magic. Put on a wetsuit and brave the Irish Sea as you paddle around the small island, home to the ruins of a 19th-century fort, thousands of seabirds and a colony of grey seals. At low tide, paddle into island crevices and watch the friendly seals splash and dive beneath your board.

Retrace the steps of Dublin's Viking origins and centuries of ship merchants with City Kayaking, the only group to offer tours on the River Liffey, running through the heart of the city.

Warm up with Art Tea at The Merrion Hotel as you step into Ireland's Georgian era in a row of townhouses converted into one of Dublin's most luxurious hotels, complete with plush couches, open fireplaces, thick carpets and one of the country's largest private art collections. Chefs create decadent desserts inspired by works hanging on the walls around you.

Sip Prohibition-era-inspired cocktails under a cloak of mystery at The Blind Pig. Feel the speakeasy vibe with dim lighting, stone walls and an air of secrecy. Despite the fact that it's in the basement of a well-known restaurant, there's no address listed online and you need a password to enter. (theblindpig.ie)

Prohibition may be good for a throwback, but it nearly killed Ireland's whiskey industry. Celebrate a resurgence of sorts with a visit to the first whiskey distillery built in Dublin in more than 100 years. Teeling Whiskey offers tours at its site in the Liberties, once the epicentre of Irish whiskey distillation.

Try Citron Restaurant for renowned Irish beef and seasonal vegetables or Cliff Townhouse Restaurant for sustainable seafood from Irish waters. Take a post-dinner stroll along the meandering paths in St. Stephens Green, past sculptures, fountains and manicured gardens. Both restaurants border the walled-park.

SUP is what's up. PURE MAGIC

Citron Restaurant fare. CITRON

Explore the city's larger, albeit less central, Phoenix Park on horseback with Ashtown Stables. Guides take you across some of the 1,752-acre park, through valleys with unobstructed views of the Dublin Mountains and forested areas home to hundreds of fallow deer.

Wrap up your weekend with a lazy tour of the city's most iconic sites. With the Lazy Bike Tour, it won't matter if you dance all night to cheesy dance tracks at the legendary Copper Face Jacks. The electric bike tour requires minimal pedalling and takes you from the pub-heavy Temple bar area to Kilmainham jail, passing Dublin Castle, the Guinness brewery and the city's most famous cathedrals along the way.

Some of the costs of the writer's trip were covered by Tourism Ireland.

STAY

The Marker Hotel: Open-air rooftop patio with the best view of the city and an address in Dublin's Docklands district.

The Dean Hotel: Contemporary-art-gallery feel, in-room record players and a spot on the nightclub-heavy Harcourt Street.

The Shelbourne Hotel: Top-hat-clad doormen, an abundance of chandeliers and a museum dedicated to its most famous visitors, including Grace Kelly, John F. Kennedy and Michael Collins.

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Gran Club Santa Lucia ★★★	Santa Lucia, Cuba	Hotel Room	Dec 02 & 09	$345 + $389 taxes
SuperClubs Breezes Resort & Spa ★★★PLUS	Nassau, The Bahamas	Poolview Room	Nov 22, 29 & Dec 06 – 4 Nights	$375 + $415 taxes
Riu Merengue ★★★★PLUS	Puerto Plata, D.R.	Hotel Room	Dec 01 & 08	$465 + $433 taxes
Canto Del Sol Plaza Vallarta ★★★★	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico	Hotel Room • Nov 23, 27, 30, Dec 04 & 07		$595 + $422 taxes
The Reef Coco Beach ★★★★	Riviera Maya, Mexico	Hotel Room	Dec 05 & 12	$595 + $422 taxes
Great Parnassus Resort & Spa ★★★★PLUS	Cancun, Mexico	Deluxe Room	Dec 05 & 12	$625 + $422 taxes
Memories Grand Bahama Beach & Casino Resort ★★★★PLUS	Grand Bahama, The Bahamas	Deluxe Island Room	Dec 05 & 12	$695 + $415 taxes
Barceló Huatulco ★★★★PLUS	Huatulco, Mexico	Deluxe Room • Dec 01 & 08		$695 + $422 taxes
Playa Blanca Resort ★★★★	Panama	Superior Room • Dec 04 & 11		$795 + $288 taxes
Fantasy Island Beach Resort, Dive & Marina ★★★	Roatan	Oceanview Promo Room	Dec 07 & 14	$795 + $335 taxes

Christmas & New Year's Deals from $445

Club Amigo Mayanabo ★★★	Santa Lucia, Cuba	Gardenview Room	Dec 30	$445 + $380 taxes
Club Amigo Carisol Los Corales ★★★	Santiago de Cuba, Cuba	Hotel Room	Dec 30	$445 + $380 taxes
Starfish Cayo Santa Maria ★★★★	Cayo Santa Maria, Cuba	Junior Suite	Dec 31	$695 + $380 taxes
Park Royal Cozumel ★★★★	Cozumel, Mexico	Deluxe Room	Dec 16	$765 + $422 taxes
Las Hadas Golf Resort & Marina ★★★★	Manzanillo, Mexico	Deluxe Room	Dec 18	$795 + $422 taxes
Riu Jalisco ★★★★PLUS	Riviera Nayarit, Mexico	Hotel Room	Dec 21	$1095 + $422 taxes
Memories Grand Bahama Beach & Casino Resort ★★★★PLUS	Grand Bahama, The Bahamas	Deluxe Island Room • Dec 30		$1095 + $415 taxes
Catalonia Gran Dominicus ★★★★	La Romana, D.R.	Hotel Room	Dec 18	$1095 + $455 taxes
Caribe Club Princess Beach Resort & Spa ★★★★ Punta Cana, D.R.		Superior Room	Dec 31	$1095 + $455 taxes
Grand Sunset Princess All Suites Resort & Spa ★★★★★	Riviera Maya, Mexico	Junior Suite	Dec 31	$1195 + $422 taxes
Riu Emerald Bay ★★★★★	Mazatlan, Mexico	Oceanview Room • Dec 29		$1195 + $422 taxes
Sonesta Maho Beach Resort & Casino ★★★★	St. Maarten	Superior Room	Dec 31	$1395 + $403 taxes

January Deals from $245

Club Amigo Marea Del Portillo ★★★	Manzanillo de Cuba, Cuba	Hotel Room • Jan 13 & 20		$245 + $380 taxes
Gran Club Santa Lucia ★★★	Santa Lucia, Cuba	Hotel Room • Jan 06, 13 & 27		$295 + $380 taxes
Memories Caribe Beach Resort ★★★★	Cayo Coco, Cuba	Superior Terrace Room	Jan 06, 11 & 14	$445 + $380 taxes
Be Live Experience Hamaca Garden & Beach ★★★	Santo Domingo, D.R.	Hotel Room Gardenview	Jan 08 & 13	$495 + $455 taxes
Plaza Pelicanos Club Beach Resort ★★★	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico	Hotel Room • Jan 04, 11 & 18		$495 + $422 taxes
Memories Varadero Beach Resort ★★★★	Varadero, Cuba	Sunrise Gardenview Terrace Room	Jan 07, 14 & 21	$495 + $380 taxes
Castillo Huatulco Hotel & Beach Club ★★★PLUS	Huatulco, Mexico	Hotel Room	Jan 05, 12 & 19	$595 + $422 taxes
Viva Wyndham V Heavens ★★★★PLUS	Puerto Plata, D.R.	Amanecer Junior Suite • Jan 12 & 19		$695 + $455 taxes
Grand Isla Navidad Resort ★★★★PLUS	Manzanillo, Mexico	Deluxe Room	Jan 01, 08 & 15	$895 + $422 taxes
Viva Wyndham Maya ★★★★	Riviera Maya, Mexico	Superior Room • Jan 04, 11 & 18		$895 + $422 taxes
Memories Splash Punta Cana ★★★★PLUS	Punta Cana, D.R.	Deluxe Room	Jan 07, 14 & 21	$1175 + $455 taxes
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5 GIFT SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE ON THE GO

Wondering what to get the traveller on your holiday list? Here are a few ideas:

1 Multi-tool wonder

Move over, Swiss Army knife — there is a new multi-tool available this season and you can wear it on your wrist. Worn as a bracelet, the Leatherman Tread is 25 tools in one; each link of this bracelet is a stainless steel implement, from various-sized screwdrivers to a bottle opener to a pick/SIM card tool. It is designed to be customizable with slotted fasteners so you can rearrange links, add new ones, and adjust to your wrist size. Available for $155 at Mountain Equipment Co-op or online at mec.ca.

2 Haulin' it

If your special someone needs new luggage, Bentley's black and red Air Canada Quest Hardside Spinner conforms to Air Canada flight regulations. Each component of the three-piece luggage set is designed with four spinner wheels, two zippered compartments, tie-down straps and a telescopic handle. The pieces are sold separately; the carry-on retails for $109.99 CAD, the 24" for $119 and the 28" for $139. If you purchase online at shopbentley.com the shipping is free.

3 No ordinary towel

Discovery Trekking's ultra fast-dry towels have silver anti-microbial technology, which makes them odour-resistant. They fold up compactly to slip into a suitcase or carry-on bag and are multifunctional; they can also be used as a sarong, a scarf and a travel blanket for the car or plane. See discoverytrekking.com.

4 Memories

With a Travelzoo.ca gift certificate you are not only giving some unique travel experiences, but you are saving money. A stay at the Auberge Saint-Antoine in Quebec City, voted one of the best hotels in the world by Travel + Leisure Magazine, is $179 (a savings of 35 per cent), dinner for two at Bauhaus in Vancouver, featuring a tasting menu by a Michelin-starred chef will set you back $120 (a savings of 45 per cent) and a Niagara-on-the-Lake Culinary Walking Tour for two is only $55 (a savings of 44 per cent). **LOREN CHRISTIE/FOR METRO**

5 A good flight's rest

Looking for a cheap and cheerful stocking stuffer? Colourful and practical, an Austin House memory foam neck pillow is perfect for sleeping on an airplane. The fleece is removable and washable. Pick one up at Staples or your local CAA office.

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Easy to find your groove in Memphis

TENNESSEE

Enjoy its rich history, its love of music, and plenty of beer

This city loves its music. It protects its history. And it's really starting to like its beer.

Travellers to Memphis need to know the basics of this Tennessee city nestled along the Mississippi River. It is a capital of blues, rock and roll and soul music, a gritty city where influential musicians like B.B. King, Elvis Presley and Otis Redding lived and worked.

It is a city rich in history, where cotton trading was once the main economic engine, where Confederate and Union gunboats battled on the river during the Civil War, where Martin Luther King Jr. came to support striking city sanitation workers and was assassinated.

And, it's a city that likes to have fun, whether it's on world-famous Beale Street or in the breweries that have started making craft beers in recent years.

Here are some essentials for visiting Memphis:

What's new

It took 34 years, but the Blues Hall of Fame finally opened in May on South Main Street, a neighbourhood undergoing significant revitalization.

Founded in 1980, the non-profit Blues Foundation has inducted about 130 performers and dozens of others into the Hall of Fame, but only now does it have a brick-and-mortar location for where music-lovers can see memorabilia attached to their favourite blues musicians, from B.B. King to Robert Johnson to Pinetop Perkins.

The building sits across the street from the National Civil Rights Museum and near art galleries, restaurants and bars just south of the downtown area. Artifacts include clothing, paintings, bronze busts, records and magazines tied to the world's most influential blues masters. There's also an interactive database.

CRAFT BREWERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A beer-brewing revolution has hit Memphis in recent years. At Memphis Made brewery, long tables give it the feel of a German beer garden, and Wiseacre has an outdoors area for chilling out.

A memorial outside the club of B.B. King on Beale Street in May, following the blues legend's death. Beale Street is home to various live music venues and shops. KAREN PULFER FOCHT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Classic attractions

One of America's most popular attractions sits in Memphis: Graceland, the home-turned-museum celebrating all things Elvis. The house is open for tours, and the attraction across the street features Elvis-related exhibits, including a neat one displaying vehicles owned and used by Elvis, from a Ferrari to a Harley-Davidson. A new 450-room hotel, Guest House at Graceland, is under construction, scheduled to open October 2016.

Other classic music spots include Sun Studio, where Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and Charlie Rich recorded music; and Stax Records, where Redding, Sam & Dave, the Staple Singers, Isaac Hayes and others cut songs in the raw, soulful "Memphis sound."

A walk down Beale Street reveals well-worn, but fun, live music venues in Rum Boogie Cafe and W.C. Handy's Blues Hall. There are plenty of shops to get that shot glass or T-shirt for a friend or relative. A visit to Blues City Cafe will not disappoint, as it serves four of Memphis's main food groups: barbecue ribs, fried catfish, hot tamales and Jack Daniel's.

The National Civil Rights Museum tells the story of the history of the civil rights movement, and its important moments and figures. Built on the location of the old Lorraine Motel — where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968 — it features a view of the room where King stayed at the hotel.

Finally, a visit to the Memphis Zoo, ranked as one of the nation's best zoos annually, is a must-do. Giant pandas, hungry hippos and playful penguins are among the living attractions. During the winter holidays, the zoo has a Christmas lights display and ice skating.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Unusual places to spend the night

EUROPE

Wake up in a cockpit or a Snowcastle

To escape the gray and gloomy atmosphere of fall, what could be better than an extended weekend stay in an unusual and quirky location? The HomeToGo vacation rental website has identified a number of surprising accommodation offers all over Europe that are worth the trip. Read on for a few of AFP's top picks:

STOCKHOLM

An air pilot's cabin

In the Swedish capital, a passenger airplane has been chartered to accommodate tourists in search of a unique nighttime spot. The cockpit has been transformed into a two-person bedroom suite with free Wi-Fi and private bathroom. The experience goes for 382 euros ($545 CDN) per night. For those with tighter budgets, a number of other rooms are available throughout the plane at a lower price range.

PARIS

A cupcake shop

In Paris's iconic Montmartre district, a tourist hot spot, the owner of a cupcake boutique rents out her establishment for overnight stays. Lucky guests will stay in a charmingly British setting and will be offered some of the owner's pastry creations during their stay. The 25-square-metre space goes for 130 euros ($185 CDN) per night.

LAPLAND, FINLAND

An ice castle

Every winter, the "Snowcastle" is rebuilt to welcome visitors that dream of spending a decidedly unique evening. The room is made of ice and can accommodate up to five people. Single rooms and suites are also available and sleeping bags are supplied with each bed. Prices start at 118 euros ($168 CDN) per night.

AMSTERDAM

A sailboat

Anchored on one of Amsterdam's many canals, visitors can rent out this entire sailboat. It includes 11 bedrooms, four bathrooms and can accommodate up to 30 guests. Travellers will have the privilege of visiting the Dutch capital from the water thanks to a tour of the canals. The sailboat contains a common room equipped with a television, a stereo system and a draft beer machine. Prices start at 731 ($1,043 CDN) euros. AFP

Torontonians share stories at Myseum

Protest and the LGBTQ community. Caribbean Carnival-related memories. Immigration in Toronto. Our natural history.

These are just a few themes that Myseum of Toronto has featured in their first year. This not-for-profit charity, which launched in May 2015, encourages Torontonians to share their stories and objects to collectively build a Toronto museum.

Myseum on the Move, the organization's primary initiative, invites members of the community to share stories and objects with Myseum experts, encouraging them to find out more about their historical connection to the city.

"Throughout the summer, we heard from hundreds of Torontonians at our eight pop-up events, and were astounded by the stories and objects they shared with us," says Karen Carter, Executive Director of Myseum of Toronto. This included stories of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or questioning (LGBTQ) community around the theme of protest in the city.

"We hosted an outstanding event with the Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives (CLGA) that shone a light on the interesting artifacts from this community's past. From buttons to flags to T-shirts, there are important pieces of Toronto's history that are held within our diverse communities," adds Carter.

Many of these stories have already been shared on social media. The organization is preparing to launch its blog in November, which will showcase some of those objects and stories.

The museum encourages all ages to participate in its events, which often feature a family-friendly element. Collaborative activities — including button making, painting and mapping exercises — help connect people to each other and to their city stories, says Carter.

In 2016, the Myseum of Toronto will also host additional Myseum on the Move events and launch its new festival in March, Myseum Intersections. Focused on further telling Toronto's stories, these events will also feature pop-up exhibitions and events throughout the city.

CONTIRBUTED

"2015 has been a spectacular year and we have been blown away with the stories and objects that people have shared with us," says Carter. "We look forward to co-creating projects with Torontonians in 2016."

To volunteer or donate, visit myseumoftoronto.com.

THANK YOU FROM MYSEUM OF TORONTO

Myseum of Toronto would like to thank everyone who supported us throughout our first 6 months of operation. We look forward to seeing you next year at the upcoming Myseum Intersections festival launching in 2016. Thank you.

MYSEUM*ONTHEMOVE:*

The Backyard Archaeology Event has been postponed until 2016. To view upcoming programmes, please visit our website www.myseumoftoronto.com.

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Time for holiday party prep

HOST WITH THE MOST

You've decided to hold a party this year: now what?

Astrid Van Den Broek

Every year you've wanted to host a holiday party but every year things have been too crazy. But now that you've settled on hosting one and you have a date picked, where do you go from here?

SEND INVITES OUT

Nancy Zaretsky, founder and head stylist of Toronto's My Perfect Party Inc., recommends getting those invitations out as soon as possible.

Once you've set the date and invites are in the mail, give some thought as to the type of party you'd like. A casual one? A formal affair? Where are you going to host it? In your home or somewhere else?

THINK THEME

Zaretsky says themed parties are the trend these days in pulling together holiday affairs.

"So it's beyond just a colour scheme," she said. "Now people do things like an Ugly Sweater Party or a movie theme or something specific like that. It really makes the party a bit more fun." It also makes party planning easier, since all your foods and decor can be wrapped around this idea.

Themed parties also lure guests to your gathering. "So if they have to wear something specific or do something for the event, it's more of a unique event for attendees and can attract people to your parties," said Zaretsky.

THE DAY OF

Work ahead and have everything prepared so that you, too, as the host, can enjoy the party and aren't spending all your time in the kitchen. "Prepare a light menu beforehand with something easy that you've done before," suggested Zaretsky. "This isn't the time to start a new recipe or use one that's challenging." Prep work also means prep ping for mid-party replacements: think appetizers on platters that are ready to go, plenty of extra ice stashed in a cooler or freezer and bowls of garnishes for drinks and appetizers also standing waiting. Better yet, when you're planning the party, opt for self-serve dishes that require minimal maintenance on your part.

SET UP A TAKEAWAY

End your party with a sweet touch in the form of a sweet or dessert table, popcorn bars or candy stand.

Think self-serve so again you're not waiting at the door handing everything out. You could even give away your leftovers if you arm your guests with unique, small containers to take food home with them. (Hint: Be sure to put a sign up at the station telling guests to feel free to fill the container up and take it home with them.)

"Anything small that's personalized is really nice and people really love that," said Zaretsky.

Think about what type of party you'd like, such as casual, formal or themed. SHUTTERSTOCK

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Toys to change how kids play

Jen Taplin

The gift-giving challenge is on — finding and picking out those just-right presents for our little ones, while ensuring we check off "everything" on their holiday wish lists.

We want to put something under the tree that our kids will go nuts over, while making smart choices, so gifts aren't tossed aside before Boxing Day.

It's a challenge toy companies embrace, putting their best products forward to help parents — and aunts, uncles, grandparents, whoever — wrap up the ideal gifts for kids.

A team from Toys "R" Us Canada spends the year tracking worldwide trends in preparation for its annual holiday hit list, said company spokesman Tamar Nersesian.

"Many of the toys on our holiday hot-toy list are changing the way kids play, using the latest innovations to make toys more interactive, endless, responsive and personalized than they have ever been before," Nersesian said.

Here are some of the toys that made the hot list:

Mega Bloks Despicable Me – Build-A-Minion ($69.99, Toys "R" Us); the Little Live Pets Clever Keet — that sings, dances and drives its own cart ($74.99, Toys "R" Us; Nerf N-Strike Modulus ECS-10 Blaster ($64.86, Walmart); and the LEGO Star Wars Millennium Falcon ($179.86, Walmart).

David Niggli, president of the American catalogue company Chasing Fireflies, said personalized toys are extra special because they can be kept as keepsakes. They have a Design Your Own Princess Dress, plus a line of personalized plush toys.

"I think parents and kids are looking for things that spark their creativity and imagination, and also allow them to be part of creating the play pattern," Niggli said.

Parents want more from toys than simple entertainment, said Diane Goveia-Gordon, president at MGA Entertainment Canada.

"We are seeing a lot of demand from parents for toys that teach S.T.E.A.M. (science, technology, engineering, art, and math)," she said. Goveia-Gordon highlights Project Mc2 fashion dolls ($29.99, Toys "R" Us), which come with experiment kits so kids can build their own lava lamp or volcano.

Other heavy hitters in the MGA line up this year include the Little Tikes Lil' Explorers Three-in-One Adventure Course ($79.90, Amazon.ca) for little ones, and the Bratz #SelfieSnaps Photobooth ($68.86, Walmart) for older girls.

Mattel has an arsenal of best sellers, but there are a few that really stick out as sure bets this year. Riza Javellana, spokeswoman with Mattel Canada, said classic toys which provide open-ended play are the go-to this year.

"Open-ended play allows each child the freedom to make play their own without rules or requirements," she said.

Top picks are the Fisher-Price Smart Toy-Bear ($124.99, Toys "R" Us), the Hot Wheels Ultimate Garage ($149.99, Toys "R" Us) and the Barbie Saddle 'N Ride Feature Horse ($59.97 Walmart).

Hasbro's list of top sellers this season is what the toymaker calls interactive and face-to-face, including: Playmation Marvel's Avengers ($119.96, Amazon.ca); the Pie Face game ($19.93, Walmart); and Play All Day Elmo ($59.94, Walmart).

Catherine Belknap and Natalie Telfer, who operate a mom's online club called Social Common, test drove toys for Fisher-Price.

"Toys that are innovative, and encourage both imagination and physical activity are the big trend," Belknap said.

Telfer said they really like Bright Beats Dance & Move BeatBo ($49.99, Toys "R" Us).

"It's perfect for creating a family dance party," she said.

Kids want toys that are fun while parents are on the lookout for durable toys that both educate and encourage imaginative and physical play, Telfer said.

"We want to purchase toys that will continue to stimulate them as they grow, and hopefully keep their attention for more than a few months in the playroom," added Belknap.

1 Project Mc2 Fashion Dolls ($29.99, Toys "R" Us)
2 Bright Beats Dance & Move BeatBo ($49.99, Toys "R" Us)
3 Little Tikes Lil' Explorers Three-in-One Adventure Course ($79.90, Amazon.ca)
4 Barbie Saddle 'N Ride Feature Horse ($59.97, Walmart)
5 Playmation Marvel's Avengers ($119.96, Amazon.ca)
6 Hot Wheels Ultimate Garage ($149.99, Toys 'R' Us)

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Groomed like an expert

GIFTS FOR HIM

For young and old, men will enjoy feeling spoiled

Tanya Enberg

For men:
From buffed nails and soothing aftershaves to smart leather travel cases for storing such toiletries, these timeless gift suggestions will leave the man in your life feeling spoiled … and expertly groomed, too.

Fitting for the classic gentleman, Brooks Brothers Classic Cologne is blended with citrus and jasmine notes plus hints of herbaceous, patchouli and sandalwood. $60 at Brooks Brothers stores across Canada or brooksbrothers.com.

Travel in style with the durable Brooks Brothers Leather Travel Toiletry Case, crafted in Italy and featuring two generous zippered compartments for on-the-go toiletries. $298 at Brooks Brothers stores across Canada.

The secret's out — men want good-looking nails. Thankfully the Quo Men's Manicure Kit makes it easy with all the quick-fix essentials, including nail clippers, tweezers, scissors and a nail file. $15 at Shoppers Drug Mart.

For time-pressed guys, the Braun Series 7 shaver is here, boasting all kinds of cool features. At 10,000 micro-vibrations per minute, it cleans, lubricates and charges at the touch of a button, and a built-in comb finds flat-lying hairs so he'll never miss a spot.

$279.99 – $339.99, dependent on the model.

From the makers of Bio-Oil comes Lipidol, a new line of skin care oils. Guys will love the brand's aftershave oil, soothing and light, it's the perfect solution for fending off dry winter skin, $8.97 at Walmart.

Got a guy with edge? Meet the Essential Rebels Kit, a great-smelling four-piece collection containing Advanced Clear Skin Facial Cleanser, Advanced Clear Skin Facial Scrub, Anti-Wrinkle Moisturizer and Rehab Roller. It comes in a cool screen-printed burlap sack. $58 at rebelsrefinery.com.

For teen boys:
Sure, he may not admit to wanting smooth feet, an invigorating body wash or a high-power face cleanser, but secretly, they're all on the teenage boy's Santa wish list (and he won't even sneer at them).

If variety is the spice of life, the Fragrance Sampler Set for Him hits the mark with 10 trendy fragrances, among them Jimmy Choo Man, Dolce and Gabbana Light Blue and John Varvatos. The kit also comes with a "scent certificate" that can be redeemed for a full-size bottle. $80 at Shoppers Drug Mart.

Here's a lip balm he won't mind carrying around. The Capital Vices Skull Lip Balm by Rebels Refinery does what it needs to do with coconut and almond oils to help soothe and hydrate lips, while packing a cool punch at the same time. $7.99 at rebelsrefinery.com.

Gentle and nourishing, the Joe Fresh cleaners and toner ($12 each) will get skin off to a fresh and healthy start for the new year.

From the old-school brand that keeps getting hipper comes the Old Spice Fresher Collection gift set, inspired by nature with fresh scents including timber, amber or citron. Suggested price $12.99 – $14.99, at Walmart.

Smooth feet for dudes? You bet. Dry, rough skin gets the boot with the Micro Pedi Man.

The device's micro-mineral roller spins 360 degrees, 30 times per second, gently buffing even the toughest of skin from the soles and heels. $49.99 at Shoppers Drug Mart or at micropedi.ca.

1 Joe Fresh facial toner, $12 each
2 Old Spice Fresher Collection gift set, $12.99 – $14.99, at Walmart
3 Braun Series 7 shaver $279.99 – $339.99, dependent on the model
4 Brooks Brothers Classic Cologne, $60 at Brooks Brothers stores across Canada or brooksbrothers.com
5 Brooks Brothers Leather Travel Toiletry Case, $298 at Brooks Brothers stores across Canada
6 Quo Men's Manicure Kit, $15 at Shoppers Drug Mart

Best beauty buys for her

Tanya Enberg

For women:
From the sweetest holiday-inspired bath goodies to the most decadent fragrance of 2015 and the best lotions and potions around, this beauty gift guide roundup will earn you big, big points with the woman in your life this season.

To wrap or not to wrap, that is the question. With the scrumptious scents of Philosophy's Shampoo, Shower Gel & Bubble Bath (Vanilla Bean Nutmeg, Christmas Cookie, Candy Cane and Iced Orchid), the biggest challenge here will be actually gifting them. $21 at Sephora.

For those with a love of luxury, Decadence from Marc Jacobs lives up to its name. Italian plum, golden saffron and iris top notes are joined by Bulgarian rose, jasmine sambac and orris at its heart with base notes of liquid amber, vetiver and papyrus woods. The emerald green bottle pays homage to the designer's handbag aesthetic with a gold chain and sexy python-inspired cap. 50 ml $115; 100 ml $140 at Hudson's Bay.

Good things come to those who receive the Most Wonderful Things holiday set from Philosophy. The kit is packed with skin-loving essentials from the much-loved brand, including Purity Made Simple cleanser, Microdelivery Peel and activator, Time in a Jar age-defying serum, Time in a Bottle high-potency vitamin C activator and Renewed Hope in a Jar moisturizer. $79 at Hudson's Bay.

The limited edition Eos holiday collection is one sweet trio (vanilla bean, sweet mint and pomegranate raspberry), packed with soothing shea butter and vitamin E. The set also includes glittery art for personalizing each balm. $9.99 at Loblaws and Walmart.

Go on, get her buffing — her nails, that is.

The smart Micro Nail electric polisher brings brilliant shine and smoothness to nails in seconds, rotating through 360 degrees, fending against tough ridges and staining for flawless nails fast. $59.99 at micronail.ca or Shoppers Drug Mart.

Winter hair recovery comes easy with Flow Professional Hair Care products, with nourishing shampoo, conditioner, detangler and the super powerful Instant Intensity 30-second treatment. $19.99-$29.99 at pro salons or flowhaircare.com.

Cosmetic brushes get the royal treatment with the deluxe Quo Cosmetics Backstage Brush Set ($70 at Shoppers Drug Mart). The set includes eight must-have makeup brushes with stunning gold handles.

For teen girls:
Not sure what beauty treasures teenage girls will want to see tucked under the tree this year? These fun and fabulous finds — big and small — are guaranteed to dazzle.

Playful and refined with lily of the valley, jasmine and rose meeting earthy patchouli extract notes, the new Miu Miu fragrance is a lesson in contrasts — youthful, soft, daring and feminine — and it will score you big points this holiday season. 50 ml $100 at Holt Renfrew.

Get the season cracking with the Quo Cosmetics Cracker Set. Each cracker contains a pretty mini lip gloss and eyeshadow. $20 for a set of four at Shoppers Drug Mart.

Sparkle and shine with party-ready nail polish from Joe Fresh ($6) in Gold Crystal.

Give the gift of glowing skin with the Hard Candy So Baked Trio featuring illuminating cream for highlighting cheekbones, a satiny-finish blush and warming, sun-kissed bronzer. $9.98 at Walmart.

Must-have stocking stuffers needn't cost a fortune. The Smokey Eye Palette (just $5 from Joe Fresh) arrives just in time to make a head-turning entrance at all of those sexy New Year's Eve bashes.

1 Philosophy's Shampoo, Shower Gel & Bubble Bath ($21, Sephora)
2 Flow Instant Intensity ($19.99-$29.99)
3 Joe Fresh nail polish ($6)
4 Eos holiday collection ($9.99, Loblaws and Walmart)
5 Hard Candy Baked Trio ($9.98, Walmart)
6 Micro Nail electric polisher ($59.99, Shoppers Drug Mart)

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Votes pour in for Bringer of Rain

Josh Donaldson became just the second Blue Jay to be named the American League's top player.
NATHAN DENETTE/
THE CANADIAN PRESS

MLB

Writers agree with Toronto fans' MVP chants

Josh Donaldson heard the MVP chants rain down on him from the Rogers Centre crowd for much of the 2015 season.

While Toronto fans got their wish Thursday night as the Blue Jays third baseman was named the American League MVP, Donaldson said he never let the crowd noise affect his play.

"I remember the first time I heard it and it was kind of like, 'OK these guys are starting to get pretty serious about what's going on here,"' Donaldson said on a conference call. "I recognized that I was having a pretty good season at the moment ... but I understood too that there was a lot of season left and my goals aren't necessarily to win MVPs but to help my team win.

"When I was in Oakland (the fans) started (chanting) for me as well and sometimes I would almost let it become a distraction — not to the point where I was nervous about them chanting that, but I wanted to come through so much for them ... I would almost put more pressure on myself," he added.

"This year I understood ... I stayed focused on the task at hand, which was winning games, and I was able to accomplish that."

> **The best of the best!!! Without a doubt!!!**
> Jose Bautista (@JoeyBats19) in a tweet after Donaldson won AL MVP

Donaldson hit .297 with a league-best 123 runs batted in to help the Blue Jays to their first AL East title — and first playoff appearance — since 1993.

The 29-year-old beat Los Angeles Angels outfielder Mike Trout for the honours.

What was characterized as a close race leading up to Thursday's announcement turned out to be an easy win for Donaldson, who took 23 first-place votes and seven second-place votes.

Washington Nationals outfielder Bryce Harper was a unanimous choice as National League MVP. Harper became the youngest unanimous MVP winner in baseball history, capturing the NL award despite his Washington Nationals missing the playoffs.

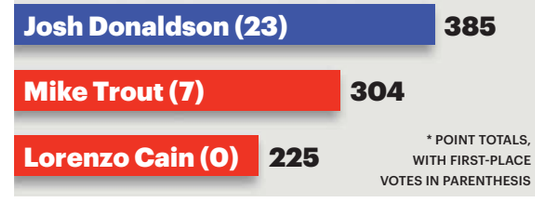
Harper turned 23 on Oct. 16, after the playoffs had already started. He got all 30 first-place votes from members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Diamondbacks first baseman Paul Goldschmidt finished second and Toronto native Joey Votto, a first baseman with Cincinnati, was third.

Donaldson joined 1987 winner George Bell as the only Blue Jays players to be named AL MVP.

"Enjoy the club, man," Bell said in a video message sent out by the Blue Jays. "I'm glad for you, for your family and for Toronto Blue Jays fans."

THE CANADIAN PRESS, WITH FILES FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COUNTING THE BALLOTS



* POINT TOTALS, WITH FIRST-PLACE VOTES IN PARENTHESIS

Shulman back in booth calling Blue Jays games

Longtime baseball broadcaster Dan Shulman will return to his roots to call upwards of 30 Blue Jays games on Sportsnet for the 2016 and 2017 seasons, the network said Thursday.

The Toronto native, who will continue his work with ESPN's Sunday Night Baseball and NCAA men's college basketball broadcasts, will work alongside Buck Martinez and Pat Tabler and also make appearances on other Sportsnet shows and platforms.

"Having hired Dan in 1995 for his first Blue Jays play-by-play role, it's great to have him back in the booth in Canada as part of our baseball broadcast team," Sportsnet president Scott Moore said in a release.

"Following the unforgettable 2015 Blue Jays season, we can't wait for 2016 to go even bigger with our baseball coverage. There is no doubt that Dan is the ideal off-season acquisition to help us achieve this goal."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

‘Best forward’ Kadri not about to stop shooting

NHL

Despite a poor shot-conversion rate, Babcock hails Naz’s input

While Wayne Gretzky’s famous saying is, “You miss 100 per cent of the shots you don’t take,” lately Nazem Kadri has been missing 100 per cent of the shots he has taken.

Kadri has gone 15 games without a goal, but the Toronto Maple Leafs centre hasn’t been afraid to shoot the puck. He’s averaging over four a game, and his 81 on the season trail only Alex Ovechkin for the NHL lead. His shooting percentage of 1.2 is the lowest in the league among players who have taken at least 50 shots. Because the law of averages is on his side, Kadri is trying not to get frustrated.

“I’d be a little more frustrated if I wasn’t getting the chances and the opportunities and it was a little bit tougher for me to get shots on nets,” Kadri said. “If I keep getting pucks to the net, good things are going to happen.”

His coach certainly thinks so. Mike Babcock has been praising Kadri almost non-stop this season, despite the lack of production. “This is my two cents on Naz: He’s been, in my opinion, the best forward on our team,” Babcock said. “He competes every night, he generates a ton. He’s a way better player than I expected.”

15

Number of games Kadri has gone without a goal even though he’s averaging 4 shots a game.

The basic stats say Kadri has been a below-average offensive player this season. He has only a goal and six assists in 19 games. But Kadri has been creating scoring chances and is among the best players in the league at drawing penalties. So Kadri is remaining optimistic. “I want to be responsible out there. That’s No. 1 for me, and the goals will come second.”

Kadri doesn’t remember getting this volume of quality chances in years, so there’s reason to believe he’ll break out of it. Whether that comes Friday when the Leafs visit the Carolina Hurricanes remains to be seen. Babcock knows Kadri will get there, both with scoring and his career. “In the end if he keeps working hard, he’ll find a way to score,” Babcock said.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Leafs’ Nazem Kadri has a league-low 1.2 shooting percentage but he has lifted Toronto in other ways. ABELIMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

IN BRIEF

Djokovic beats Berdych to seal ATP semifinals berth

Novak Djokovic reached the semifinals of the ATP World Tour Finals by extending his dominance over Tomas Berdych, beating the Czech player 6-3, 7-5 on Thursday in their last round-robin match.

Djokovic needed only to win a set to secure a place in the last four because of the season-ending tournament’s tiebreaker rules and made sure of that after breaking for a 5-3 lead in the first.

He has beaten the Czech five times in the last six years at the ATP finals.

Earlier, Roger Federer clinched first place in the group by beating Kei Nishikori 7-5, 4-6, 6-4 to finish the round robin stage unbeaten.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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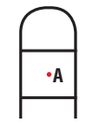

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RECIPE Grilled Ham Apple and Cheese Sandwich

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

You made it to Friday! And you totally deserve this amped up grilled cheese with salty ham and sweet apple.

Ready in
Prep time: 10 minutes
Serves 2

Ingredients
- 4 pieces whole grain bread
- 2 Tbsp butter, softened
- 4 slices ham
- 1 cup cheddar, grated
- 1/2 Granny Smith apple, thinly sliced
- 1 Tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp yogurt
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard

Directions
1. Mix the mayo, yogurt and mustard in a small bowl.
2. Warm up a large skillet to medium heat. Butter one side of two pieces of bread and place them bread butter side down in the pan. Spread the mayo mix evenly across the upward facing slices while they're in the pan.
3. Divide the grated cheese in half and sprinkle it over the bread. Now lay two slices of ham onto each piece of bread. Now add a layer of apple slices. Top with the other pieces of buttered bread, butter side out.
4. Place a small frying pan or plate over the sandwiches and then top it with something heavy, like a can of tomatoes. Check to see if it's ready to flip after the first piece of bread has been in the pan for about five minutes. When it looks crisp and golden, flip over and repeat the pressing action. Cook on the other side about another five minutes, but keep an eye on it. Remove sandwiches from the pan, slice in half and serve.

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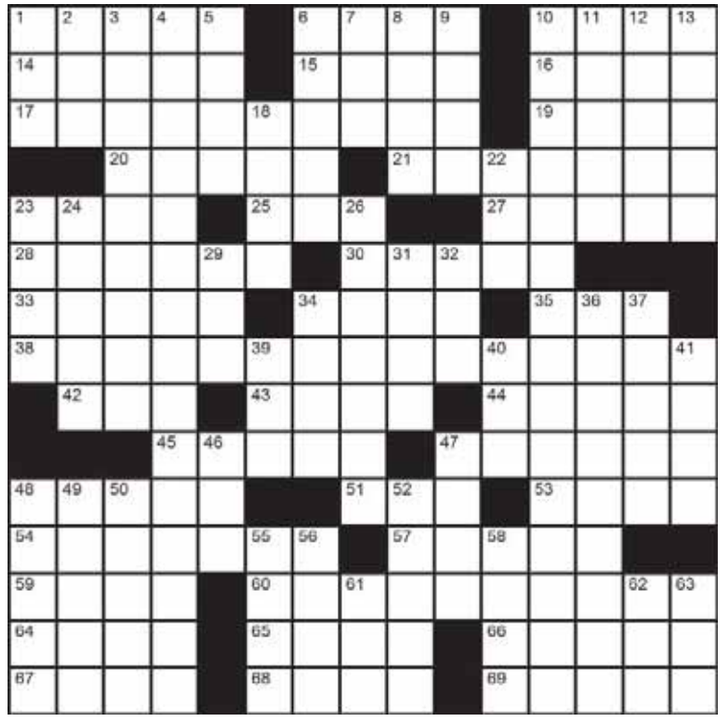
BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Glassmaking ovens
6. "__ with Anna Olson" on Food Network Canada
10. Nature's green carpeting
14. Projecting window
15. Online auction site
16. Tom Jones' "__ __ Should Ever Leave You"
17. Hit tunes, TV shows, Bestsellers, etc.: 2 wds.
19. Talk
20. Springy sticks
21. Driveway surface
23. Hershey's treat
25. "Case of the Ex" songstress
27. Willie of '80s sitcom "Charles in Charge"
28. "See? Isn't that eggsactly what I said?": 2 wds.
30. Wire
33. "Family Ties" mother
34. US crash-investigating agcy.
35. Calif. NBA team
38. Traditional handcrafted blankets: 2 wds.
42. Sun. church delivery
43. Amazes
44. Piece of land
45. Greek mythology shield
47. Band-Aid injury
48. Mine entrances
51. '1000 Forms of Fear' songstress
53. "The Lion King" (1994) lioness
54. Canadian city with the slogan 'Our Tide Is Rising'
57. __-examination
59. Sacred symbol of ancient Egypt
60. Persuasive marketing spiel: 2 wds.
64. Lacquered metalware
65. "Lean __ __" by Bill Withers
66. "Be _ __ and get..." (Sugary request starter)
67. Angry snits
68. Without
69. Flavour-adders to dishes

DOWN
1. Shear
2. 'Ranch' suffix
3. Montreal... Louis-__ Lafontaine Bridge-Tunnel (St. Lawrence River crossing)
4. Sound effects from the DJ's turntable: 2 wds.
5. Garden invader
6. American flag seamstress, __ Ross (b.1752 - d.1836)
7. __ Dhabi
8. Songwriter Ms. DioGuardi
9. Optometrist's study
10. Toronto-born actor whose credits include "Total Recall" (1990), "The Perfect Storm" (2000) and Canadian outlaw biker gang miniseries "The Last Chapter": 2 wds.
11. Slice __ __ (Carnivore's sandwich ingredient)
12. Sedimentary rock
13. Cobblestones
18. Casa __ (Toronto attraction)
22. Chum
23. Footprint
24. Caffeine nuts
26. Rachel McAdams' profession
29. Repeated word in "She Loves You" by The Beatles
31. Questions
32. Lettered sauce
34. "__ get it!" (Aha! moment)
36. Carving material
37. Mil. rank: 2 wds.
39. "__ the Dog" (1997)
40. __-Aztecan languages
41. Plato's promenade
46. Cornerstone abbr.
47. Taverns
48. Family of Italian violin makers
49. Blood giver
50. Linen tape for trimmings
52. Slurpee-like frozen beverages
55. Bears: Spanish
56. Cute-style grandmother
58. Colourful fish
61. Alphabetic trio
62. Taxi
63. Timecard abbrs.

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Know when to push for what you want but also when to back off. With both the Sun and Mercury moving into one of the best areas of your chart it won't take much to get the good things in life.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
It will be easy to get impatient today but with Mercury's entry into the area of your chart that governs joint financial matters you'll need all your energy for more important issues.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
Work hard but once you reach your targets reward yourself with plenty of rest and relaxation. Also, don't be too eager to confide your fears to people you don't know if you can trust.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
Bring what you've been working on to a conclusion and you will have accomplished something truly worthwhile. The Sun in Scorpio unleashed the creative side of your nature — now enjoy the rewards.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
You will have to deal with a rather emotional situation today, one that threatens to bring grievances to the surface. You must face your inner demons as well as external enemies.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
You will be remarkably persuasive today: your way with words will win over everyone. You will also have to deal with situations that call for a more hands-on approach.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Money doesn't have to be the center of your universe but you do need to make sure you get what you deserve. You've worked long and hard — don't let others take the benefits from you.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Do something dramatic before the Sun moves out of your birth sign on Sunday. Any doubts you've had must be swept away. If it feels right to you then it does not matter what the rest of the world thinks about it.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
There is something you need to clear up before the Sun moves into your sign at the weekend. This is the one and only chance you will get, so don't waste it.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You may be wondering why everyone is being so nice but don't let your doubts hold you back. You are liked and everyone wants to help.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
You may be a recluse but you need to get engaged with the world. If you approach someone in a position of power with a request there is every chance it will be granted, so what are you waiting for?

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
Your confidence has been sky-high and you certainly won't be afraid to take chances. That the possibility of failure never enters your mind means that success is more likely — maybe even guaranteed.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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		1	3		5	6		
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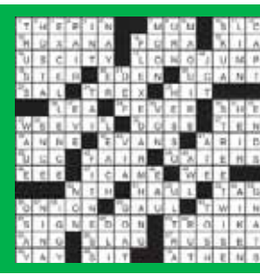

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2	9	1	5	7	3	8	4	6
8	7	4	6	1	2	3	5	9
6	1	8	9	2	5	4	7	3
9	5	7	4	3	6	1	2	8
3	4	2	7	8	1	9	6	5

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